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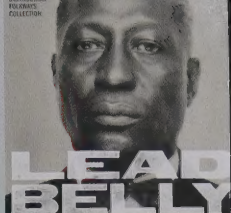
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**Ford's
Ocean**



Tom Paxton
"John Goodman was so
good, such a nasty asshole."

Reviews
Lead Belly
"Extraordinary"



**LEAD
BELLY**

penguin eggs

pharis & jason romero

"I swear
there are
only a couple
of degrees of
separation
between
Jay-Z and the
Carter Family"

norman blake
les hay babies
the alt

connie kaldor

garbutt

ey ford

ta brown

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no.65

2015


MUSIC

Issue No. 65 Spring 2015 \$5.99



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Natalie MacMaster + Donnell Leahy

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Cover Story

42 Pharis & Jason Romero

With impeccable taste, these old-time specialists recorded *A Wanderer I'll Stay* in a make-shift studio in the foothills of the Cariboo Mountains.

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Revered trio of traditional Irish musicians makes one of the most uplifting albums of the year.

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Sweet harmonies with striking Acadian accents propel this trio's bright and imaginative poetry.

24 Connie Kaldor

Moving and disarmingly diverse, her *Love Sask* reflects on the small and monumental idiosyncrasies of life.

26 WiL

A.K.A. Wil Mimnaugh, he approaches his lyrics with an earnest thoughtfulness that highlights the sweeping tracks of his *El Paseo*.

28 Gabrielle Papillon

From the nurturing musical community of Halifax emerges the beautiful wordplay and gorgeous arrangements of orchestral folk pop.

30 Donnell Leahy & Natalie MacMaster

Bob Ezrin normally produces the likes of Pink Floyd, Lou Reed, Alice Cooper... Lately, though, two of Canada's celebrated traditional fiddlers.

32 Ken Whiteley & The Beulah Band

Creative curiosity inspires this journeyman multi-instrumentalist and his cast of cohorts as they stretch from jugband to swing jazz.

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One of the most hilarious and engaging performers in all of folk returns with his first album in a decade.

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The former Be Good Tanya records her *Indian Ocean* with the legendary Memphis soul session musicians Hi Rhythm.

40 Norman Blake

The celebrated acoustic guitarist behind some of America's most momentous roots recordings ever makes a rare solo album.

34 Pieta Brown

Her haunting sixth album draws from the Beat poets and writers and their passionate ethos of peace and universal love.

NEW FROM RED HOUSE RECORDS

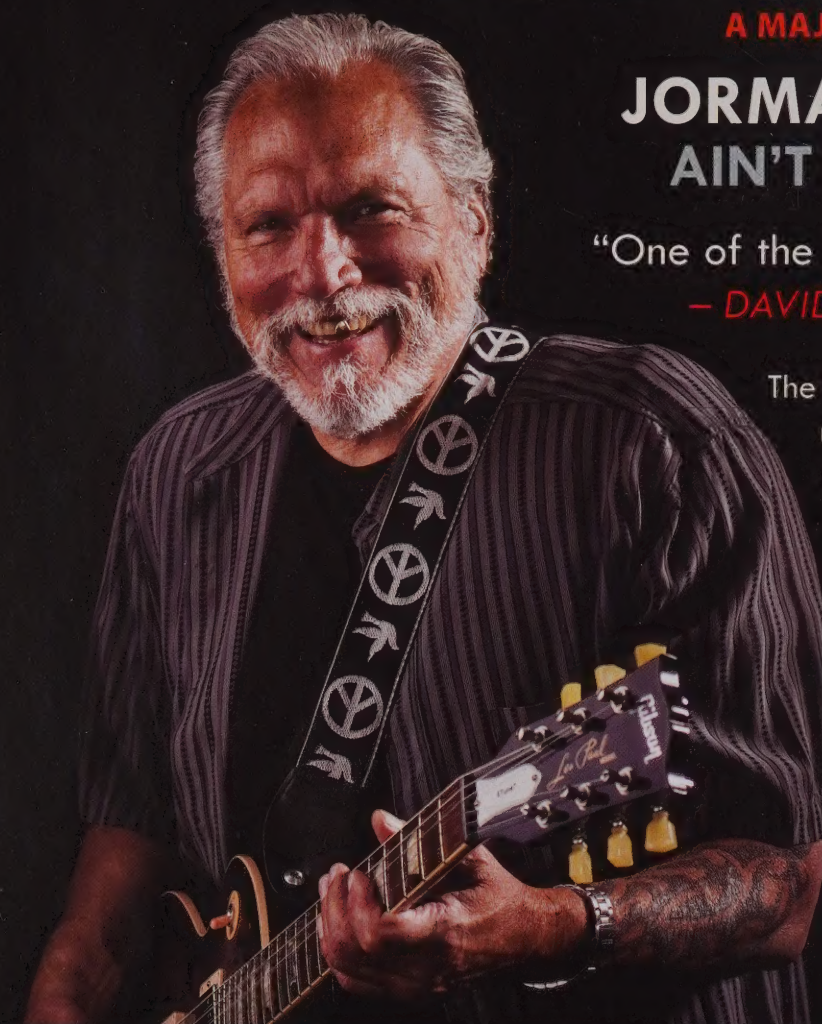
WHERE ROOTS MEET THE HERE AND NOW!

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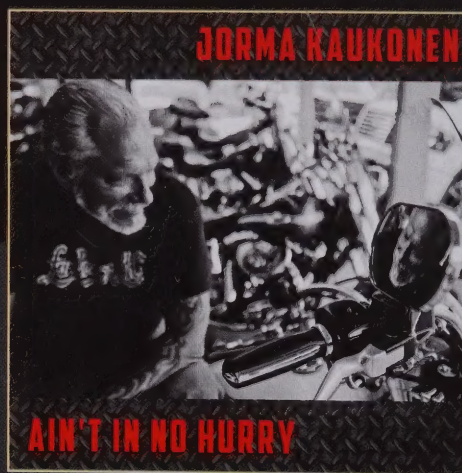
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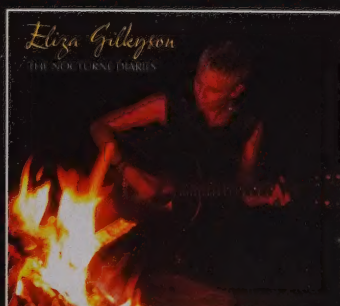


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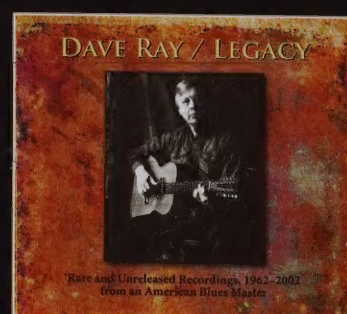


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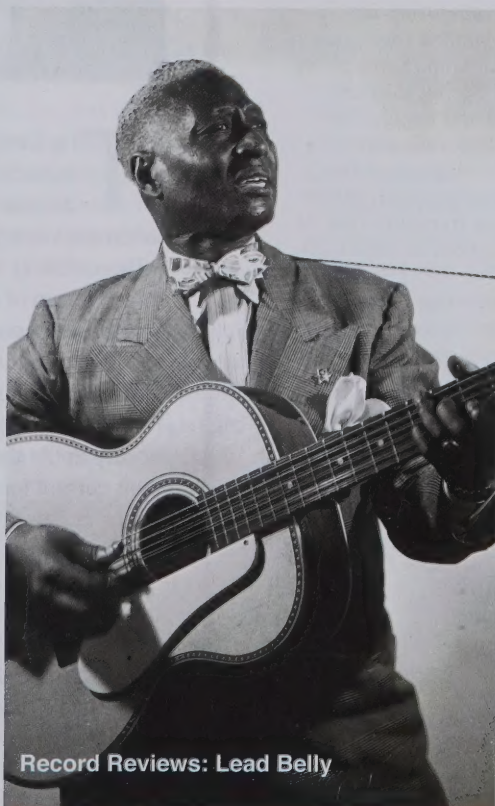
Les Hay Babies et The Freels.

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Colin Irwin appeals to young musicians to stop being so career-minded and take chances.



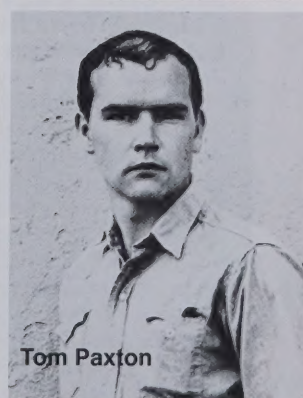
Natalie MacMaster & Donnell Leahy



Record Reviews: Lead Belly



Les Hay Babies



Tom Paxton



The Alt.

In *Penguin Eggs* issue No. 64 our article on Big Dave McLean inadvertently featured a photo of Jim Byrnes. Our sincere apologies to Dave, Jim, and Black Hen Records for any inconvenience this caused.

penguin eggs

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This magazine takes its name from Nic Jones's wonderful album *Penguin Eggs* — a collection of mainly traditional British folk songs revitalized with extraordinary flair and ingenuity. Released in Britain in 1980, it has grown into a source of inspiration for such diverse artists as Bob Dylan, Warren Zevon and Kate Rusby.

Nic, sadly, suffered horrific injuries in a car crash in 1982 and has never fully recovered. In 2012, however, he finally made an emotional comeback, performing at several events throughout the summer. His care and respect shown for the tradition and prudence to recognize the merits of innovation made *Penguin Eggs* such an outrageously fine recording. It's available through Topic Records. This magazine strives to reiterate its spirit.

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Editorial



The Canadian Folk Music Awards celebrated its first decade last November—a landmark worthy of a toast or two.

The unfailing hard work of a committed group of alternating volunteers has taken Canada's big folk night out to this juncture. Not to diminish the various contributions of the many who have guided the CFMAs thus far, I seriously doubt they would still exist in their current format if not for the galvanizing determination of co-founder Grit Laskin. His unselfish, indomitable spirit has often dragged this event to this point. But who will provide the care and inspirational guidance when Laskin eventually retires?

Surely it's already a concern to the current board that the gala show no longer interests the national news media. It started off with country-wide coverage. Yet few, if any, daily newspapers mentioned the 2014 Ottawa event, certainly none in the West.

While Ottawa drew the largest crowd to date, the gala has never really attracted the size of a paying audience it truly deserves. A year ago in Calgary, the number of empty seats was devastatingly conspicuous. By all accounts, Saint John, NB, in 2012 drew flies. Even Winnipeg, with its acclaimed folk festival, could only partially fill Pantages Playhouse Theatre in 2010.

Its critics grumble: that it runs too long due to its bilingual format; that it attracts too few headlining acts; that

too few recipients show up for the event...and on it goes.

Last December, I attended the Scots Trad Music Awards in Inverness. That event started in 2003, two years before the CFMAs. And yet it is light years ahead in terms of development. Granted Scotland is a tiny country compared to Canada, making access to the event easier and much more affordable. And, unlike their Canadian counterparts, the Scots receive financial support from various levels of government.

But their gala is also bilingual (Gaelic and English), runs for more than four hours and featured 11 live acts. It was sold out and partially televised, albeit on the BBC Gaelic channel. Only Julie Fowlis failed to show up to accept her award but posted a video acceptance instead.

Energetic, entertaining, and seamless with the use of teleprompters and video screens, the Trads even paid tribute to those lost to the folk community in the past year. While it included the likes of Pete Seeger, even stalwart folk club volunteers received pictorial recognition.

But what set it apart for me was the seating format. The Trads primarily sold corporate tables but included concert seating. On each table: four complimentary bottles of wine, two boxes of chocolates, and a bouquet of flowers. And you could order drinks as the show progressed. It made it fun. Obviously it's a format that appeals to the Scots. Can it work here? Well, why not? Success, after all, breeds success.

Budget constraints and an inconceivable lack of interest from the CBC has hampered the development of the CFMAs. In the coming years, the organization will bounce between Edmonton, Toronto, and Calgary—fertile enough ground to fashion a favourable future. But surely bigger and bolder steps are needed for the journey.

— Roddy Campbell

The Record That Changed My Life

Maria Dunn



Photo by: Chris MacLean

Maria Dunn salutes Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard's ground-breaking feminist lyrics on *Hazel & Alice*.

Penguin Eggs invited me to list my 10 all-time favourite albums in 2012. For several weeks, I joyfully revisited my music collection, then agonized for several days over choosing only 10. If that wasn't difficult enough, now I'm challenged to write about the one album that changed my life. *Hazel & Alice* immediately came to mind, followed closely by Dick Gaughan's superb *Handful of Earth*. Happily, both turned out to be on my list three years ago, so at least I'm consistent there—no further agonizing required! And, if the number of songs I learned from *Hazel & Alice* (five) is any indication, my inner statistician agrees that it's the album to go with here.

I first encountered *Hazel & Alice* as a volunteer roots DJ at CJSR in the late 1980s. A friend of mine who loved country music urged me to check out Hazel Dickens. The *Hazel & Alice* album cover that I pulled from the record stacks was stunning: a stark black-and-white photograph of two women's faces—honest, knowing, unaffected, strong, beautiful.

I'll admit that Hazel's "hard singing" took a bit of getting used to but her unaccompanied song *Pretty Bird* made an immediate impact. Here was a feminist song, written in the 1970s, that sounded older than the hills, exquisite in its edge and delicacy at the same time, and in its subtle reflection on a woman's dilemma: fulfil one's own potential and dreams or suppress them for love in a traditional relationship. I hadn't heard anyone express these feelings in song before and as a young woman discovering my own life's path, I identified strongly with the lyrics. Before long, I was smitten with Hazel's voice and spent hours trying to learn those intricate vocal inflections.

I was also greatly impressed by her fearless

writing—unabashed, affirming, and in solidarity with her sisters. *Don't Put Her Down, You Helped Put Her There* clearly connects the discrimination against and abuse of women to their sexual exploitation, not in a sentimental, pitying way but with the challenge: "And if she acts that way / it's cause you've had your day / don't put her down / you helped put her there".

Even the sharp, soulful country song *My Better Years* differs from the usual "cheatin' and hurtin'" narrative with its forgiving but firm final verse: "I'll try not to blame you / I'll try not to shame you / all I can do now is wish you well / But if you should need a friend / I'll be there 'til the end / but don't ask me to love you again".

Of course, *Hazel & Alice* wouldn't be the album it is without the stellar contribution of Alice Gerrard. Alice, too, was writing her own songs (and instrumentals) and singing about subjects no one else was singing about: women shaping their personalities and looks to keep a man on *Custom Made Woman Blues* and the poignant *You Gave Me A Song* inspired in part by Hazel's life.

Their two voices together, Alice's rich alto contrasting Hazel's harder and higher tone, are magical. My friend and early singing partner Dawn Cross and I tried to achieve their tight but seemingly effortless harmony singing.

Hazel and Alice's breezy version of The Carter Family's *Hello Stranger*, their lovely take on Utah Phillips's *The Green Rolling Hills of West Virginia* and their haunting duet on the traditional hymn *A Few More Years Shall Roll* are fine examples.

I know that their influence, both as writers and singers, crept into some of my own songs: *Do You Know Slim Evans?*, a bluegrass-styled song about labour rights in 1920s Drumheller Valley; the a cappella opening to an old song, *The Fool*; and the chorus to a new song I've just finished, *Mr. Potter*.

Over the years, I learned how much Hazel and Alice did, singing songs to support the struggles of working people and women, their actions true to their songs. I even had the good fortune to meet these gracious, grounded women in person and fluster my way through awestruck, awkward thank you's for their inspiring music.

Hazel Dickens died in April, 2011. I heard the sad news while on tour in the Maritimes, raised a glass and sang a lonesome song, grateful for her distinctive voice and outstanding contribution to folk music.

Alice Gerrard still writes and sings as expressively and powerfully as ever. Check out her 2015 Grammy-nominated recording *Follow The Music* (www.alicegerrard.com).



HAZEL & ALICE

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stingray top 10

1. **Amelia Curran**
They Promised You Mercy (Six Shooter)
2. **Anaïs Mitchell**
Xoo (Wilderland Records)
3. **Bronwynne Brent**
Stardust (Independent)
4. **Catherine MacLellan**
The Raven's Sun (Independent)
5. **James Hill**
The Old Silo (Borealis)
6. **Oh Susanna**
Namedropper (Sonic Unyon)
7. **Lynne Hanson**
River of Sand (Independent)
8. **Sin And Swoon**
Did I Turn The Oven Off? (Independent)
9. **Steph Cameron**
Sad-Eyed Lonesome Lady (Pheromone)
10. **The Once**
Departures (Nettwerk)

Based on the most-played folk and roots discs played nationally on Stingray Music (formerly Galaxie Radio) throughout November, December and January 2014-15.

fred's records top 5

1. **Hey Rosetta!**
Second Sight (Warner Music)
2. **Amelia Curran**
They Promised You Mercy (Six Shooter)
3. **The Once**
Departures (Nettwerk)
4. **The Freels**
The Freels (Independent)
5. **The Ennis Sisters**
Stages (Independent)

Based on album sales for November, December and January, 2014-15 at Freds Records, 198 Duckworth Street, St. John's, NL, A1C 1G5



Bronwynne Brent

ken whiteley's all-time top 10



Ken Whiteley

Sonny Chillingworth
Sonny Solo (Dancing Cat Records)

Nat King Cole
Vocal Classics (RCA)

Golden Gate Quartet
Sings Favourite Spirituals (RCA)

Woody Guthrie with Cisco Houston,
Leadbelly, Sonny Terry: Sing Folk Songs (Folkways)

Alan Lomax
Southern Journey Vol.12: Georgia Sea Island Recordings (Prestige)

Linda Morrison
Line By Line (Heartstrung Music)

The Swan Silvertones
Love Lifted Me (Specialty)

Muddy Waters
The Best of Muddy Waters (Chess Records)

The Watson Family
The Watson Family of Deep Gap, North Carolina (Folkways)

Marion Williams
Blessed Assurance (Atlantic)

Ken Whiteley's latest release, Ken Whiteley and the Beulah Band, is on Borealis Records. Our feature on Ken runs on page 32.

wfmfms top 10

1. **The Bros Landreth**
Let it Lie (Slate Creek Records)
2. **Chic Gamine**
Christmas, Vol. 1 (Independent)
3. **Shakey Graves**
And The War Came (Warner Music)
4. **Various Artists**
Native North America Vol 1 (Light In The Attic)
5. **Big Dave McLean**
Faded But Not Gone (Black Hen)
6. **Amelia Curran**
They Promised You Mercy (Six Shooter)
7. **Del Barber**
Prairieography (Linus)
8. **Connie Kaldor**
Love Sask (Independent)
9. **Danny Michel**
Black Birds Are Dancing Over Me (Warner)
10. **Jake Shimabukuro**
Grand Ukulele (Mailboat Records)

Based on album sales for November, December, January 2014-15, at the Winnipeg Folk Music Festival's Music Store, 203-Bannatyne Ave., Winnipeg, MB. R3B 3P2

highlife top 10

1. **Frazey Ford**
Indian Ocean (Nettwerk)
2. **Lucinda Williams**
Down Where The Spirit Meets The Bone (Highway 20)
3. **Orland Julius**
Jaiyede Afro (Strut)
4. **Various Artists**
Native North America Vol 1 (Light In The Attic)
5. **The Gloaming**
The Gloaming (Justin Time)
6. **Toure-Raichel Collective**
The Paris Session (Cumbancha)
7. **Bob Dylan**
The Basement Tapes Raw (Columbia)
8. **Keith Jarrett/Charlie Haden**
Last Dance (ECM)
9. **Joe Driscoll & Sekou Kouyate**
Faya (Cumbancha)
10. **Prince Fatty Meets Nostalgia 77**
Kingdom of Dub (TriThoughts)

Based on album sales for November, December and January, 2014 - 15, at Highlife Records, 1317 Commercial Drive, Vancouver, BC, V5L 3X5

permanent records top 10

1. **Frazey Ford**
Indian Ocean (Nettwerk)
2. **Dan Mangan & Blacksmith**
Club Meds (Arts&Craft)
3. **Mike McDonald**
Live at the Blue Chair Cafe (Mike McDonald)
4. **Barr Brothers**
Sleeping Operator (Secret City)
5. **The Provincial Archive**
It's All Shaken Wonder (DevilDuck)
6. **Sturgill Simpson**
Metamodern Sounds In Country Music (Thirty Tigers)
7. **Eric Bibb**
Blues People (Stony Plain)
8. **Rory Block**
Hard Luck Child: A Tribute To Skip James (Stony Plain)
9. **Tweedy**
Sukierae (dBpm/ANTI)
10. **Amelia Curran**
They Promised You Mercy (Six Shooter)

Based on album sales for November, December and January, 2014-15, at Permanent Records, 8126 Gaway Blvd. Edmonton, AB, T6E 4B1



Rory Block



sillons top 10

1. **Fred Pellerin**
Plus tard qu'on pense (Tempête/DEP)
2. **Lisa Leblanc**
Highways, Heartaches and Time Well (Distribution Select)
3. **Leonard Cohen**
Popular Problems (Columbia)
4. **Adam Cohen**
We Go Home (eOne Music)
5. **The New Basement Tapes**
Lost On The River (Harvest/Universal)
6. **Chloé Sainte-Marie**
À la croisée des silences (Independent)
7. **Various Artists**
Légendes d'un Peuple - le Collectif (Spectra/DEP)
8. **Luluc**
Passerby (Independent)
9. **Mara Tremblay**
À la manière des anges (Distribution Select)
10. **Tire Le Coyote**
Panorama (La Tribu/DEP)

Based on album sales for November, December, January 2014-15, at Sillons, 1149 Avenue Cartier, Quebec, QC, G1R 2S9.

soundscapes top 10

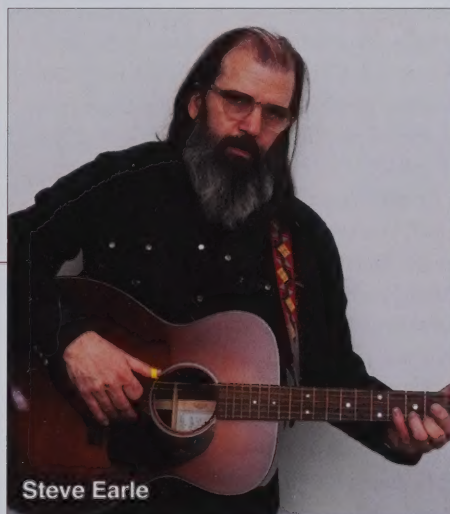
1. **Bob Dylan**
The Basement Tapes Raw (Columbia)
2. **The War On Drugs**
Lost In The Dream (Secretly Canadian)
3. **Various Artists**
Native North America Vol 1 (Light In The Attic)
4. **Bahamas**
Bahamas is Afire (Brushfire/Universal)
5. **Jennifer Castle**
Pink City (Idée Fixe)
6. **Blue Rodeo**
A Merrie Christmas To You (Warner)
7. **The New Basement Tapes**
Lost On The River (Harvest/Universal)
8. **Leonard Cohen**
Popular Problems (Columbia)
9. **Tanya Tagaq**
Animism (Six Shooter)
10. **Frazey Ford**
Indian Ocean (Nettwerk)

Based on album sales for November, December and January 2014-15, at Soundscapes, 572 College Street, Toronto, On, M6G 1B3

ckua top 20

1. **Amelia Curran**
They Promised You Mercy (Six Shooter)
2. **Jenn Grant**
Compostela (Outside)
3. **Steve Earle**
TerraPlone (New West)
4. **Oh Susanna**
Namedropper (Sonic Unyon)
5. **Thompson**
Family (Fantasy)
6. **Frazey Ford**
Indian Ocean (Nettwerk)
7. **Samantha Savage Smith**
Fine Lines (Pipe & Hat)
8. **Joni Mitchell**
Love Has Many Faces ... (Rhino)
9. **Hot Rize**
When I'm Free (Ten In Hand Records)
10. **Eric Bibb**
Blues People (Stony Plain)
11. **The New Basement Tapes**
Lost On The River (Harvest/Universal)
12. **Adam Cohen**
We Go Home (eOne Music)
13. **Various Artists**
A Songwriters Tribute To Chris Smither (Signature Sounds)
14. **Michael Jerome Browne**
Sliding Delta (Borealis)
15. **Lucinda Williams**
Down Where The Spirit Meets The Bone (Highway 20)
16. **Steph Cameron**
Sad-Eyed Lonesome Lady (Pheromone)
17. **Leonard Cohen**
Popular Problems (Columbia)
18. **Rose Cousins**
Stray Birds EP (Old Farm Pony Records)
19. **The Barr Brothers**
Sleeping Operator (Secret City)
20. **Crooked Brothers**
Thank You I'm Sorry (Independent)

Based on the most-played folk, roots and world music on CKUA radio, www.ckua.org, throughout November, December and January, 2014-15.



Steve Earle

SWANSONGS



The Holmes Brothers – L to R: Sherman Holmes, Willie “Popsy” Dixon, Wendell Holmes

Willie “Popsy” Dixon

The soaring, multi-octave falsetto of Willie Leonard (Popsy) Dixon and his down-to-earth driving backbeat on drums elevated The Holmes Brothers into the vanguard of old-time gospel, soul, and blues performers as they evolved from a New York City-based bar band to recording with the likes of Van Morrison, Peter Gabriel, and Joan Osborne.

Sadly, the affable Dixon was hospitalized in Richmond, VA, with pneumonia in early December. While in hospital, doctors discovered he had advanced bladder cancer. He died Jan. 9, aged 72.

Born in Virginia Beach, VA, on July 26, 1942, Dixon was brought up by an aunt and uncle. When he was three, they moved to Brooklyn, NY. From the outset, he attended the local Pentecostal church where he learned to sing and play drums.

“He started playing the drums in church when he was four years old,” his daughter, Desiree Bertold, told the *Richmond Times Dispatch*. “My grandfather and a deacon in the church showed him how, and he picked it up fast.

“He didn’t know how to read and write music, but if you played the note, he’d sing it on the beat and play it on the beat after he heard it only one time.”

Dixon would spend over a decade with R&B singer Tommy Knight and through him he met Wendell Holmes. By most accounts, Dixon sat in with Wendell (guitar) and his brother Sherman (bass) for the first time at the Dan Lynch Blues Bar in New York in 1979. They blended instantly and went on to play a weekly gig there for the next decade. Their exquisite three-part harmonies would inspire the likes of a young Joan Osborne, who would later produce their albums *Speaking in Tongues* (2001), and *Feed My Soul* (2010). The latter album was inspired by a bout of cancer Wendell overcame.

However, it took until 1989 before The Holmes Brothers signed with Rounder Records, who released their debut, *In The Spirit* (1990), to universal acclaim. It featured Texas musician Gib Wharton on pedal steel, lap steel, and Dobro, which added a saintly country feel to their already distinctive sound. Wharton would record and perform with the band for

the next several years before pursuing his own interests.

In 1992, The Holmes Brothers were the first American group to sign with Peter Gabriel’s Real World Records. They travelled to his studio near Bath, England, and recorded the traditional gospel album *Jubilation* with the likes of Remmy Ongala, Sheila Chandra, and Karl Wallinger. During their stay with Gabriel, The Holmes Brothers contributed to the album *A Week or Two in the Real World* (1994), which featured them performing *That’s Where It’s At* with Van Morrison. They would also write the complete soundtrack and star in the lauded film *Lotto Land* (1995). In all, The Holmes Brothers released a dozen albums. Their latest, *Brotherhood* (2014), received international accolades.

Former U.S. President Bill Clinton considered himself a fan. And in July 2014, The Holmes Brothers received a National Endowment For The Arts National Heritage Fellowship, the highest honour the United States bestows upon its folk and traditional artists.

– Roddy Campbell



Clive Palmer

Clive Palmer

Co-founded *The Incredible String Band*

Born 1943

A banjoist of rarest sensitivity and nuance and a founder member of the Incredible String Band, Clive Palmer, who died on Nov. 23, 2014, writes Ken Hunt, could rightly be called the will o' the wisp of the British folk scene.

The fourth child born to William and Violet Palmer, Clive Harold Palmer was born in Edmonton, Middlesex, north of London, on May 14, 1943. Stricken by polio in infancy, his mother steered him. As a boy, he was providing vocal interludes at appearances by a local tap-dancing ensemble, the Foster-Miller Dance Troupe. He traded a guitar his brother had given him for a cul-de-sac design banjo made by Alfred D. Cammeyer.

He grew into a boy-musician who took lessons with Alfred Lloyd, one of the finest exponents of the Victorian and Edwardian-era classical-style banjo repertoire. Came skiffle and Soho's beckoning coffee bars, came the young art student. Consumed by beatnik counter-culture, he hitchhiked and busked his way to Paris. Deported in 1962, he made his way to Scotland and a cold-water apartment on the floor of which he literally pitched his tent. He met Robin Williamson and worked in the Incredible String Band's duo precursor.

One album in the can, Palmer was off to Afghanistan—the future perception of his will o' the wisp credentials nailed. Subsequently,

he played music with a succession of musicians, most notably Wizz Jones, the Famous Jug Band, COB (Clive's Original Band) and the Temple Creatures. That will o' the wisp tag stuck. Grounding everything, in Grahame Hood's epitaph *Empty Pocket Blues—The Life and Music of Clive Palmer* (2008), Billy Connolly states, "Clive was unquestionably the best banjo player I ever heard." That is more important than the Folk Family Trees.

—Ken Hunt

Sheila Stewart

Renowned Traditional Traveller Singer

Born 1935

Sheila Stewart, who died on Dec. 9, 2014, was one of the most notable carriers and ambassadors of Scotland's Traveller culture. Culturally distinct from Gypsy or Roma people, Travellers suffered similar prejudice. Mainstream Scottish society marginalized and reviled them; folklorist-leaning notables such as Hamish Henderson, Alan Lomax, Ewan MacColl, and Peggy Seeger regaled Traveller achievements. They banded descriptions of their importance as repositories of Scottish vernacular culture and oral folkways.

Piping, singing, and storytelling ran in the Stewart family. Born to Alec (1904-1980) and Belle, née Isobella MacGregor (1906-1997) in Blairgowrie in Perthshire on July 7, 1943, a family of considerable distinction in cultural terms, Sheila would eventually advise politicians on Travelling People, their plight and their culture. In 2006 she became a Member of

the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) for her services to Scottish traditional music.

Born in a stable in Blairgowrie, Perthshire, Sheila learned ballads mainly from her mother. Her uncle Donald MacGregor, though, taught her her most famous song *The Twa Brothers*. Hamish Henderson brought the Stewarts to national attention through his 1954 and 1955 field recordings. Topic Records would later release five essential LPs featuring the family, and in particular its matriarch, Belle Stewart. They include: *The Stewarts of Blair* (1965), *Festival At Blairgowrie* (1967), *The Travelling Stewarts* (1968), *The Back of Benachie* (1968) and *Queen Among The Heather* (1977).

Of the family tradition, MacColl and Seeger quoted Sheila in *Till Doomsday in the Afternoon: The Folklore of a Family of Scots Travellers, the Stewarts of Blairgowrie* (1986) as saying in 1979, "We didnae learn the songs to entertain other people. We never ever sung them to an audience, we never sung them to anybody else—it was just in the family or other family that came in. We didn't learn them for any gain or anything. We learned them because we loved them—to bring them to ourselves."

Sheila Stewart died in Dundee, knowing she had sung at the 1976 U.S. Bicentennial celebrations in Washington for President Gerald Ford and Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh. She also represented underprivileged communities in Scotland when she sang for Pope John Paul II before a variably estimated 300,000 to 500,000 in Glasgow in 1982.

—Ken Hunt



Sheila Stewart



Suze Casey

After 10 years producing the Canadian Folk Music Awards, Bill Garrett – co-owner of Borealis Records – retired in November from an organization he helped co-found. The CFMAs has since recruited Suze Casey as Garrett's successor. Casey spent more than 30 years as artistic director of the Calgary Folk Club, worked extensively organizing showcases for the North American Folk Alliance, and put in a six-year stint as a member of the CFMA board; although she, too, stepped down at the last annual general meeting in Ottawa. Casey's first gala event for the organization takes place in Edmonton Sunday, Nov. 8, 2015, at the Citadel Theatre.

– Roddy Campbell

What inspired you to accept the role of producer of the CFMAs gala event?

I've been involved with the CFMA for the last six years as a board member in charge of the jury process, and was really looking for a change. Bill Garrett, who's been the producer of the gala for the first 10 years, was stepping down and he enquired if I would be interested. I wanted to maintain my relationship with the CFMAs—I love the organization. I love the whole event—and I was looking for a change.

What do you bring to this new position?

My background includes 14 years as the producer of the North American Folk Alliance

showcases, as well as nearly three decades as artistic director of the Calgary Folk Club. So I have a very deep experience in terms of producing shows. I've been at it for a really long time and really understand the breadth of Canadian folk music, as well as how to put on a great live event.

How do you see the gala event evolving?

This year, we'll be staying with the same format as in the past. We're always open to looking at different formats. I really believe when you step into a position like this that you take the best of the past and then expand. We have been streaming it live for the last few years...we'll continue to do that. We have been featuring five live artists; we'll continue to do that. The 19 juried award recipients will [again] be announced [on the night] as well as the nominated award. I'd like to see the show tightened up a bit, I've been really actively working towards having that happen. It is really a celebration of Canadian folk music so it gets a little familiar and fun. It is what it is.

How will you do that?

We are intending to keep it shorter. We can't control the amount of time people use receiving their award. And we can't control how many of the recipients are going to be in the audience. So it's always a bit of a moving dart board, to bring it in on a certain time frame. We're

always looking to tighten up the parts of the show that we can tighten up to make sure that it's engaging and of interest to recipients, their families, folk fans, and the media.

What do you see as your biggest challenge?

Very large shoes to fill. Bill Garrett's a wonderful producer and has done an excellent job of bringing the vision to life. So, there's real legacy for me to uphold. In addition, it's producing a show that really speaks to the entire folk community, and so really allowing that breadth and range and vastness of the Canadian folk music scene. Those are the two main things, and I guess another one would be a different location every year, so learning a new venue, and new people to work with. It's exciting!

The CFMAs will continue to move around city to city?

Until now we've done a different city each year. Ottawa's been repeated. We made a decision two years ago to focus on communities that had a vibrant [folk] scene that could support the awards. [And] we could bring some national media attention to that local folk scene, raise up its profile, and just really get the CFMAs firmly established. So this year its in Edmonton, next year Toronto, 2017 back in Calgary, 2018 back in Ottawa...and that's as far as we've mapped out at this point in time.

Will you stick with the concert seating format?

Yes. We have looked at the table and dinner kind of concept but, at this point in time, we really want to establish the financial foundation...so we'll keep it as concert seating. But there's always room for conversation about how it may evolve.

How are the folk awards doing financially?

We did very well in Ottawa this year, and we did very well in Calgary...and so those last two gave the CFMAs a stronger foundation. Before that it was a bit seat-of-the-pants and fly-by-night and fingers-crossed-and-hope-we-balance. We don't receive a lot of funding...it is sponsorship, which is increasing as the profile of the awards continues. It's enough of a reason for maintaining a small number of locations, because we can start to build some relationships in those communities, which then allows for the financial picture to be more solid.

www.folkawards.ca

Concertina player Simon Thoumire single-handedly started The Scots Trad Music Awards—the annual bilingual (Gaelic and English) celebration of Scottish traditional music—in 2003. Twelve years later, it has developed into a sold-out, four-hour extravaganza featuring 11 live performances broadcast on national television. While the Trads have similar goals as the Canadian Folk Music Awards, their gala events are markedly different. Thoumire, though, drew inspiration from Canada's East Coast Music Awards.

— Roddy Campbell

You call your event The Scots Trad Music Awards, rather than folk; why?

I felt that maybe the term folk was slightly tainted...I say that in a nice way, in regards to the younger generation. There was a lot more talk about the traditional music of Scotland. And the word traditional is quite long and boring, so I shortened it to Trad. Also, at the time we had the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards, and I think The Scots Trad Music Awards differentiated it a little bit, as well.

What made you start them?

I think at the time we were already running the BBC Radio Scotland Young Traditional Award, and there was definitely a feeling around that there was so much things happening for young people, and there was nothing really for the older musicians. We really needed something to celebrate the general theme...and work out a way to remark on it.

I used to run it all myself but you can't keep up with all the technical wizardry. So someone who comes in who understands how to talk to soundmen...and that's been our success. We try and get the best people to do it for us.

What have been the major changes you've overseen in the past 12 years?

Well, back in 2005, I paid a visit to the East Coast Music Awards in Canada and I loved it. I was amazed with the way they moved around the area. I thought, 'This is brilliant'. So I came back, and we did that. So from 2003-2005 we were in Edinburgh but in 2006 we went up to the Highlands, up to Fort William, and stayed there for two years. That brought a lot of changes, more than I actually thought. We'd been at the Queen's Hall in Edinburgh, and we could only fit in 20 small tables; all of a sudden we had 45, and the event just changed. Then in 2008, we went on TV on BBC Alba when that



channel launched. It brought the production values right up. 2012 was the first year we went live on TV, which ramped everything up again. The technical crew are just fabulous, and they take the bulk of the pressure on the night.

The public votes on your awards rather than have them juried.

Yeah, basically because it's the public that buys the music; it's the public that goes to the gigs; and it's the public that supports the music. Without the public, we wouldn't have any awards. When we launched the awards back in 2003, Pete Heywood of *The Living Tradition* magazine said to me, 'Remember you must always keep your aim at the top of everything'. My aim was to increase the profile of traditional music to the public, and to the media. So that was the concept from the start. So basically to bring the public in on every bit of decision making, it's about profile raising. They were involved right from the start.

What do you charge for a table?

Basically £600 (\$1,150) a table. I think that's really cheap. If you went to arts or business awards, they're all £1,200 to £1,500 a table. I'm very conscious about not overcharging, too, because it's about the musicians. There's no point in them not being able to afford to come along. It's just not fair because we can't

do it without them. I remember back in 2006 when we first had tables, all the nominees sat in the plastic concert seats while all the guests sat at the tables for the free wine. We learned that lesson quickly. The tables seat 10, and we put six bottles of wine at each table, and some chocolates. The tables are a massive point of revenue. A lot of organizations buy them. We don't do food, 'cause it would take too long.

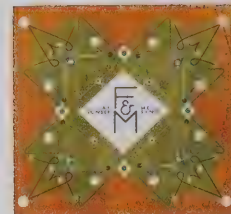
What sort of budget do you work with?

The way we work it is that the TV pays the artists. We used to pay them. Actually, we used to ask them to do it for free and we'll accommodate them, and they have a fantastic time. Nowadays, it's great, a bit of publicity, it goes live on TV, and so the TV picks up the fees. I'm very keen on everybody getting the same, so it's paid on a man-per-man, which is the way the TV would work.

Do you receive government funding?

Yes. Creative Scotland [a public body that supports the arts and is funded by the National Lottery and the Scottish government] fund us. We get three-year funding. The Highland Council [in Inverness] were very good this year. We also sell the branding rights to MG Alba—they're the company that organizes the television. We also sell individual sponsors for the awards, like the Album of the Year.

Introducing F&M



Melancholy needn't be a downer insist Ryan and Rebecca Anderson of Edmonton's artful folk-pop outfit, F&M.

Once a larger band at its inception nearly a decade ago, F&M (named after a funeral home) has been distilled down to a trio now, her piano, accordion, guitar, and vocal balancing his guitar and voice. All that is mixed with serious expertise by Bryan Reichert, who doubles on guitar, bass, mandolin, violin, percussion, and backing vocal.

They still manage to find plenty of melancholy.

"I think that unabashed melancholy is something we took from Portuguese fado music," admits Ryan. "Canadians have Leonard Cohen but the Portuguese are emphatic about their sadness. In the end we're melancholy but not sad, and there is a difference."

"Songs can be so cathartic," notes Rebecca. "Being human can mean sounding out that pain, working through things. That's part of the joy of life, giving voice to those sorrows in a communal way. You can make music by yourself but sharing it with others becomes a spiritual experience."

A listen to their recent sixth release, *At Sunset We Sing*, offers exquisite atmospheric evidence and, yes, up moods, too. Beyond those emotional qualities it's also their most sophisticated record yet, a marvellous set of 11 tracks, acoustic and electric, offering layered textures, delicate melodies, arresting voices, and a smart sense of space in songs often inspired by foreign lands.

Ryan explains: "Each song on this record is almost like a little postcard home from a different European country," listing ties to Germany, Russia, or France, to touring Canada, and to winter.

Then there's that fling with fado. At this writing the couple was preparing to holiday in Lisbon, to absorb as much of Portugal's national song form ("and the wine") as they could first hand. They have already folded a taste of fado into songs such as *And We Will Mend Our Broken Hearts*, referencing Portuguese guitar on Bryan's mandolin and earthy rhythms on Rebecca's accordion but avoiding the deep sadness of fado singers.

"We love fado music," says Ryan, "the way they do the runs and the quick fingering on guitar. I think Bryan's work mirrored that without being traditional fado."

F&M's songs are wrought from a mutual love of music, literature, and film, from fighting shyness and baring their life experience in the lyrics. Edmonton natives both, Rebecca was born to a musical family and classical training while Ryan took a fleeting stab at rock'n'roll before he got more serious about music post-college. After meeting in 1997 and marrying two years later, both put out individual solo projects, rehearsals for something greater.

F&M started in 2006 as they worked towards the release of their well-received debut *Let Every Light Shine* the next year. Subsequent albums leaned to smoother pop angles (*Sincerely*, 2010) or pretty, spare acoustic settings (*Wish You Were Here*, 2011) as they chalked up five cross-Canada tours. Bryan's degree in music production brought much to their live shows and studio work as the new CD became a synthesis of all that came before.

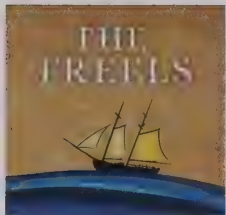
Ryan and Rebecca had good excuses for taking several years to put out *At Sunset We Sing*. Sporting accidents left Ryan with a broken hand and Bryan with a broken leg so Rebecca had to play roadie on their last tour.

After all that, it's not sadness but enthusiasm on the opening *Hands In* when Ryan sings, "I'm down, I'm down". It's about "being ready for anything", about playing and performing again. Welcome back.

— By Roger Levesque



F&M, L to R: Bryan Reichert, Rebecca and Ryan Anderson



Introducing The Freels

Finding a good name for a band is a daunting task. Musicians want something that is simple and yet evocative, a name that captures their musical spirit. Not all bands are successful at finding the perfect moniker. When one hears the words Matchbox 20, for example, thoughts of pyromania and lung cancer are more likely to spring to mind than images of clean-cut indie rockers. But the name The Freels does a beautiful job of conjuring a picture of young Newfoundlanders who play jigs and reels with vitality, ease, and unbridled joy.

The band takes its name from Cape Freels on the north shore of Bonavista Bay and its music from the rich traditions of Newfoundland and Ireland. In 2011, Anthony Chafe (guitar), Andrew Fitzgerald (fiddle, bodhrán), Danny Mills (flute, whistles), and Maria Peddle (lead vocals, fiddle), were all members of a large, traditional music youth group called The Celtic Fiddlers. They became friends and decided to form their own band. A year later, they were joined by Fergus Brown-O'Byrne, an up-and-coming concertina/accordion player. Chafe reminisces: "Our first gig was the tree-lighting ceremony at Bowering Park. There were a lot of people there and we were nervous as hell but it was a good start, and we were hopeful that something would come of it."

Ranging in age from 19 to 29, The Freels are at the point in their lives when academic and career pursuits are their first priority. Peddle was selected to do a year-long Rotary exchange during the 2014-2015 academic year, and Mills decided to enrol in an MBA program in Waterford, Ireland. Before they temporarily went their separate ways, they embarked upon a crowd-funding campaign to produce their first CD.

"We just wanted the CD for ourselves; we knew Danny and Maria were going away for a year, so we decided to record it before they left, so that whatever happened, we could at least say that we did it," says Chafe. "We intend to get the band back together if everyone comes home but right now we are just going with the flow."

Their self-titled CD is available through SingSong Records and is a fresh, lovely assortment of traditional and contemporary songs and tunes. It also includes a fun, Celticized version of Paul Simon's *Cecilia*, juxtaposed with the classic Scottish instrumental *Jean's Reel*. While many bands in Newfoundland, such as The Dardanelles, focus exclusively on the performance of Newfoundland material, The Freels collect their repertoire primarily from the Irish and Newfoundland traditions, and from any source that moves them personally.

"I think we all recognize the similarities between Irish and Newfoundland tune structures, but in general, I think we all have a similar vision of what sounds and feels good and what has a good energy," states Brown-O'Byrne.

"Most of our rehearsals are like mini-sessions; we just jam and try different things. Our arranging is fairly spontaneous; we do some refining in the final stages but a lot of it is just playing with it and seeing where it goes."

— By Jean Hewson




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Introducing The Fortunate Ones

Carl Gustave Jung, the famous psychoanalyst, once said, “The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.” Catherine Allan and Andrew James O’Brien experienced such a transformation when they met in 2010. O’Brien heard Allan sing with her brother at a private event in downtown St. John’s and knew he had to sing with her. He was an aspiring singer/songwriter from Mount Pearl working on his first CD and Allan was a talented musician from the town of Corner Brook on Newfoundland’s west coast. She joined forces with O’Brien as his side musician but as their personal bond grew, so did their professional relationship.

“Catherine’s involvement on that equal level made our show infinitely more compelling, and our act changed from ‘solo male singer/songwriter with accompanist’ to this chemistry-driven duo,” says O’Brien. “We have a relationship that extends beyond our performing lives, so because we are equals in that regard it made sense to make it official in our music, too. For us, everything has gotten bigger and better since we made that decision. The shows have been better, the response has been better, and it is more fulfilling for us.”

Their CD, *The Bliss*, was released on Old Farm Pony Records, a label owned by noted songwriter and fellow Atlantic-Canadian Rose Cousins. It is a mercurial mix of both hearty and ethereal melodies, poignant yet hopeful lyrics, big sounds and small, subtle ones. Tender arrangements forged by accordion, guitar, mandolin, keyboards, cradle their voices and create a wholeness that is greater than the sum of its individual parts. It is a testament to successful collaboration when one cannot tell where one contribution ends and the next begins, and it helps when each contributor is aware of their individual strengths and limitations.

“I’m more melody driven,” says Allan. “Andrew’s lyrics are so beautiful they often inspire me to write a melody—or I might write a melody and take it to Andrew and that might spark an idea in his head, which is a powerful thing. We are still learning that craft. The songs on this album are the first songs we co-wrote. I’m already excited for the next album,” she laughs.

With their many successes over the past year, Allan and O’Brien are indeed feeling very fortunate, and readily express their gratitude for having a job that allows them to connect in meaningful ways with a host of people from different walks of life. “We’re trying to make our music and get out there, and at the same time be grateful for every opportunity we’ve been given,” says Allan. “And hopefully, we can pass that spirit on to other people, whatever their situation.”

O’Brien agrees. “It’s a pretty cool job at the end of the day. We are all in pursuit of the same things and I don’t think there’s any difference between my buddy who owns a car dealership, the guy I went to school with who is a home-care worker, or me as a musician. We are all on the exact same road, just in different lanes.”

— By Jean Hewson



Introducing Allison Lupton



There's a fascinating wee note on the cover of *Half My Heart*, Allison Lupton's most recent CD, that describes it as a patchwork quilt of songs and tunes.

"Quilts are made up of beautiful pieces that are sewn together to make something even more beautiful," she explains. "These songs come from different places and from different writers that I have admired forever, and when I put them into place somehow they all fit together."

As well as collecting traditional songs and tunes from varied sources, she has become deeply immersed in writing her own material, and she tells the stories behind them with infectious enthusiasm.

"*Bonnie and May* is based on a true story told by my grandfather. He was ploughing with his team of horses on his dairy farm in Oxford County, Ontario. My father was a toddler at the time and he followed my grandfather out into the field and lay down in the furrows. My grandfather had no idea he was there but when the horses came to my father they stopped and wouldn't go any farther. My grandfather went around to the front of the plough and there was his son in the furrow! When he told that story he would get emotional and tear up. I was telling it to some friends one night and then the song started to write itself. That got me interested in telling other stories.

"The song *Half My Heart* is about the London Foundling Hospital in the U.K. Parents who could no longer care for their children could take them there, with the idea that some day they may be able to take them back when they were in better straits financially. They would bring a fabric token that was used for identification. Half would stay with the parents and half would go with the child—so if they came back for the child they could match up the fabric. I thought it was a powerful story."

As she speaks, the great passion she has for her work—both as a talented flute player and a fine singer—and also about the people she works with becomes ever more apparent.

"They are all such brilliant musicians but now they are all good friends, too. I can't decide what I like better, the performance or the rehearsals! It's always such a joy and a surprise to see what they come up with when they add their personalities and talents to the project."

Speaking of which, next on the agenda is recording an album with Tannis Slimmon and Rosemary Phelan, who provide harmony vocals on *Half My Heart*. I ask her if they have a name yet and she responds with characteristic verve and amusement.

"Yeah! It's The Lucky Sisters, because I was sitting on the back deck with Tannis and Rosemary and I just said, 'Jeez, how lucky am I?' ... and it kinda stuck. Maybe we'll get outfits with horseshoes and things!"

As our conversation ends and we sign off, I find myself wondering if they'll be quilted, and then hoping that they will.

— By Tim Readman



Allison Lupton



Introducing Slow Leaves

Two years ago, Grant Davidson quit his job as an English teacher to give his one-man musical project Slow Leaves the best shot he could. The decision resulted in *Beauty is So Common*, an album that's enjoying regular airplay on CBC Radio, and has drawn comparisons to both J.J. Cale and the golden era of '70s country-rock.

"There's no question it was the right decision. Of course there are stresses, financial being a significant one. I live continuously in varying degrees of crisis, at least internally. If anything, working on music allows me to have stress that feels purposeful and targeted," said Davidson.

After releasing two spare albums with limited production budgets under his own name, it was collaboration with producer Rusty Matyas (The Sheepdogs) on *Beauty is So Common* that has taken Davidson to the next level. Matyas's buoyant pop sensibility elevates what could have been a lovely but forgettable song in *Everybody Wants To Be In Love* to a full-blown roller-coaster ride (and certified radio hit) that mimics the experience of falling in love.

"Rusty was great at having a vision for how all the parts would fit together. I guess I saw the big picture and he saw the details. We also became quick friends and I think the fact we were having a lot of fun gave the sessions a real natural and unforced feel that I believe we captured on the recordings. I think Rusty's production gave the songs a certain accessibility."

The title *Beauty is So Common* speaks to Davidson's awareness that singer/songwriters with appealing words and melodies are a dime a dozen, and to stand out he would require something more. Matyas's varied contributions (he and Davidson played all the instruments, except for bass on one track) manage to elevate rather than drown out Davidson's soft and emotive delivery.

There's a flutter in his voice that was inspired by Jolie Holland, and a timbre that sounds much like Doug Paisley's. You could put Paisley's *Constant Companion* on shuffle with *Beauty is So Common* and an uninitiated listener would struggle to differentiate between the two.

If it's Paisley he sounds like, Davidson shares the high-brow literary sensibility of another Toronto songwriter, Justin Rutledge. Rutledge writes songs about Walt Whitman and used to edit a literary magazine. The title *Beauty is So Common* is not just a mission statement for Slow Leaves but also a quote from Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges. And the line "on the strength of the absurd" from the excellent and most Paisley-esque *Second Chances* is from philosopher Soren Kierkegaard's treatise on religious faith, *Fear and Trembling*. Davidson's own lyrics hold their own in such lofty company, with verses such as, "*The temper in the streets*

*/ Is one of boredom
stirring / So I must take
leave / Or join the wea-
ry" or "We met up young
in the shallows / Moving
at your side like the
moon from a car window
/ A lifelong drive to the
gallows / We agreed we
would take it slow".*

This all adds up to a deep and layered album, as catchy as it is emotionally rich, that would seem to contradict the age-old advice of, "Don't quit your day job".

— By Mike Sauve





Traditional Irish music made on an Appalachian mountain, with nary a pub in sight.

By Colin Irwin.

Picture the scene: a remote log cabin way up in the Appalachian Mountains in a jaw-droppingly beautiful corner of North Carolina. It's snowy and cold, it's been empty for six months, there's nothing around for miles, the "pub" is a few bottles of wine under the kitchen sink and inhabitants have to go out each day with an axe and a wheelbarrow, chopping wood to keep the fire going and making friends with the local mice.

What, you wonder, would happen if you were to parachute three of Ireland's finest musicians into this tranquil, isolated, challenging, and alien environment...

What happens is Nuala Kennedy, John Doyle, and Eamon O'Leary spend the first three days there adapting to the silence and purity, trying to keep the fire stoked to stave off the cold and

attempting to get their equipment working. They then spend the next three days recording *The Alt*, one of the most refreshingly clean, uplifting, and glorious albums you will hear all year.

"I like out-of-the-way places where there's not a lot of human activity and we'll always remember recording that album," says Nuala Kennedy. "We'll still be talking about it in 20 years. There was so much atmosphere there. We're all pro musicians and if we're put together in a studio the chances are that we'll come up with something pretty decent. But what's going to happen when you're thrown together in these conditions when the real characters really come through? It was cold and stressful but we all pulled together and came out of it as a very strong unit."

Why go up a mountain to make your first album together?

"The Appalachians have this great connection with Ireland and we thought it would be appropriate to record these old songs in those mountains. There were a lot of obstacles and it was touch and go whether we would get it finished on time. We really had to concentrate. It seems like a miracle now."

The Alt take their name from a magical glen by the side of one of Ireland's most famous mountains, Knocknarea in Co. Sligo, reputed to be the final resting place of the ancient warrior queen Maeve. It was close by there in the village of Coolaney that Nuala Kennedy, John Doyle, and Eamon O'Leary finally managed to sit down together to knock out some ideas, play a few songs and tunes, and see if their long-debated dream of creating a band together could become reality.

It wasn't easy. Apart from recently marrying the Virginian singer/songwriter A.J. Roach, with whom she has also been working in a duo, Dundalk-born Nuala has a well-established career in her own right as a singer and flautist; Solas mainstay John Doyle's exceptional talents as a superlative guitar accompanist have created a long waiting list for his services as a session player and duettist with the likes of Karan Casey, Liz Carroll, Julie Fowlis, and Kate Rusby; and Dubliner Eamon O'Leary's career in America is going great guns as a guitarist, bouzouki player and accomplished singer/songwriter.

"We've known each other for a long time," says Nuala. "Me and John had been talking

about starting a vocal trio and were thinking about who else to ask, and around the same time I'd been working with Eamon, so I suggested him. We were all at a teaching camp in North Carolina and tried a few things there and everyone enjoyed it so we thought it would be fun to do more. I was in Scotland and John was staying in Sligo with his family so we all met up there and started working on harmonies. We didn't write anything down but we'd painstakingly work out these harmonies and put it all together and then meet up again a few months later when we'd completely forgotten what we'd previously done. It was a slow burn but I really liked the way the music changed and settled over a long period of time. We took a lot of care over it and it was worth it..."

They are all songwriters but one thing they decided on very quickly was to concentrate on reviving some of the great old traditional songs at the heart of all their roots. "We all write songs and we all love contemporary music but our first love and passion is traditional music, which we feel is under-represented."

So they pored through old song books, drawing on Child ballads, collections by Sam Henry, and their memories. Nuala honoured her own heritage by bringing to the party *One Morning In May*, a traditional song dating back to her teens when she first heard it sung by one of her key influences, the late Co. Louth singer and flute player Eithne Ní Uallacháin. "I loved her singing. She was teaching at the same school in Dundalk as my mother. There weren't a lot of people playing traditional music in Dundalk at the time so she was a big inspiration, both as a

singer and flute player."

With John Doyle bringing a strong Sligo influence—an extract from a Yeats poem about The Alt features on the album sleeve—they resolved to keep the arrangements relatively simple in order to reflect the peace and beauty of the area from which they take their name and maximize the impact of the songs they sing.

"We had a plan. It would be easy for us just to play tunes and let one person do a song while the other two fit in with it—that's what we've spent our whole lives doing. It was the harmony aspect that appealed to us, to get a blend and mesh that was greater than the sum of the three parts. We wanted to be more than decent and spent a lot of time working on it. John's parts on the bouzouki and guitar interweave and provide a nice backdrop for the harmony vocals and give it a richer texture.

"Once we worked on a few songs it started to snowball. Through trial and error, we found our own way of working as a three-piece and after a few rounds of that it became easier. Now we have a solid idea of what we want to do. We have a great basis to build on with a lot of potential for the future. We want to work and we aim to be touring a lot more."

The problems of juggling diaries and freeing up the time to do that remains, but where there's a will there's a way and The Alt certainly believe they've hit on something special enough to make it worthwhile.

"The shows we've done so far have been great," says Nuala. "And I think we look good onstage. We're just like Peter, Paul & Mary!"



The Alt, L to R: Eamon O'Leary, Nuala Kennedy and John Doyle

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Les Hay Babies

They sing sweet harmonies with striking Acadian accents—the cultural tie that binds.
By Tony Montague

Les Hay Babies have toured in Europe many times since getting together in late 2011. But they're not letting success abroad loosen their ties with the Acadian communities of New Brunswick in which the three women were raised.

"We find it's important not to look past where we're from," says Vivianne Roy, the band's acoustic guitarist who—like her friends Julie Aubé (banjo) and Katrine Noël (ukulele)—also writes and sings. "Being able to tour internationally actually makes you see home from

another perspective, and makes us reflect a bit more on things."

Les Hay Babies play a bright and imaginative blend of folk, pop, soft-rock, old-time, and country, and their lyrics are poetic without being pretentious. They write and sing in Acadian, a striking hybrid of French (some of it antiquated for mainstream French-speakers) with a regular sprinkling of English.

Their punning name hints at their approach. "The way we speak in French we use a lot of English words and it feels natural for us to say Les Hay Babies—but the 'Les' is very important, to show we're bilingual. For us it's a French name. Where we come from is pretty bilingual."

The three women grew up in different parts of New Brunswick—Noël in Dalhousie on the Quebec border, Aubé in Memramcook near Moncton, and Roy in Rogersville in the centre of the province. "It's a town of just 1,200 people and I used to work at a grocery store, so I

got to see all sorts of characters and meet most of the town. It's kind of a lumberjack community—people are very welcoming. We all grew up listening to country music and classic rock."

As her main musical inspirations, Roy cites Wilco, Julie Doiron, Feist, and after a moment's pause adds Bob Dylan, Townes Van Zandt, Cat Stevens, Crosby Stills and Nash, Neil Young—"that era of music". There's a wistfulness and whiff of nostalgia in many Les Hay Babies songs on their debut *Mon Home-sick Heart* that suggests the McGarrigle Sisters, and their harmonies are rich and sweet without being cloying.

All three were emerging singer/songwriters when they met at a music competition in New Brunswick. They became good friends, and three years later decided to start a band. The big break came soon—from an unlikely direction. For several years the Festival Interceltique in Lorient, Brittany, has featured a stage for



Acadian artists. “One of the guys programming there was from Moncton, and we were upcoming artists, so he invited us. There were two shows per day for something like 10 days. It was very intense.

“It felt like a boot camp. But it was awesome. We got back and we were a lot tighter, and we had a lot of fun, too. It was our first time playing in France. We were there with other artists from back home, so they were showing us how to interact with the French—because we’re from the backwoods back home.”

The encounters with Les Français must have gone down unusually well, despite—or more likely because of—any language difficulties.

“Some of the French we speak is 400 years old for people in France so a lot were surprised at first,” says Roy, who’s on her cellphone at a restaurant in central France on Les Hay Babies’s thirteenth trip to Europe in little more than three years. “Also our accent in Acadia

is very different from anything in Quebec. But it was really well received, and I think it intrigued a lot of people.”

Linguistically fastidious French may choke on their canapés trying to fathom lines such as ‘yinke d’la junk anyway’—Les Hay Babies’s dismissal of TV in the humorous and strongly country-flavoured song *J’suis pas une femme à marier* but Roy and her colleagues are being true to who they are and where they’re from.

“We don’t want to be pretentious in the way we speak, and try to sing in a language that doesn’t feel right in our mouths. When we started out we just really wanted to be able to play our town. We weren’t looking to the whole Quebec scene. We were thinking small, and keeping it natural for us. If we sang in standard French we’d probably be judged.”

Les Hay Babies perform both as an acoustic trio and with a small backing band. For *Mon Homesick Heart* producer François Lafontaine—keyboardist with leading Quebecois indie-rock band Karkwa—brought in some friends to beef up the sound. “He had big ideas and wanted to invite the musicians he was used to playing with. It was really great.”

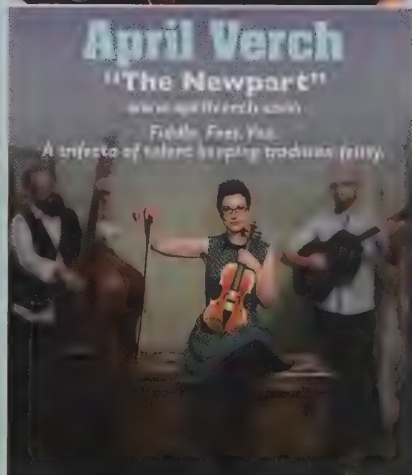
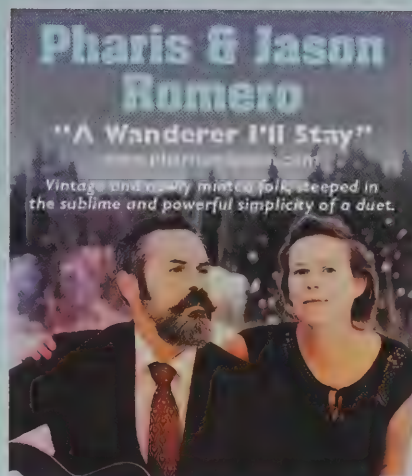
The elements of rock are judiciously used, and don’t smother the acoustic folk. They combine beautifully on *Fil de Téléphone*, written and delivered by Roy, a song that encapsulates the sense of yearning in many of Les Hay Babies’ songs. The last line of the chorus translates as “our love is hanging from a telephone wire”. What’s the story behind it?

“I was afraid you were going to ask that,” says Roy, with a laugh. “I met a guy in Moncton when I was living there and fell in love and after a while Les Hay Babies started touring in Europe. We kept things going but it was a long-distance relationship—you try, but it only goes so far.”

Les Hay Babies won’t be slowing down on the touring anytime soon. “We have another tour mostly in Quebec in April with the full band. And we’ll be going to Paris for La Fête de la Musique (June 21), and in September we’re looking at touring Texas and maybe Louisiana. We were actually planning to take a year off—but now we’re just taking a two-month break between tours. Just yesterday we started to look at the concept for our second album.

“Julie’s writing a poetry book. And I’m working on a solo project called *Laura Sauvage* in Montreal. Les Hay Babies is our priority but you have to be creative elsewhere, too, and to come back to the group with your own personality, and not make it homogenized. So we’re all experimenting elsewhere to have something new to bring to the table.”

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Connie Kaldor

Her new disc provides a quietly moving testament to the small and monumental in life.

By Pat Langston

Growing up under the stars of Saskatchewan's endless sky cut two ways, according to Connie Kaldor. "I've loved the stars since I was young," she says. "What I love about the stars and the universe is they make you feel totally insignificant and yet totally important. It makes you realize you're part of this absolutely astounding thing."

Kaldor, 61, and now a Montrealer, transforms that feeling of simultaneous insignificance and importance into haunting music in *Androme-*

da, one of the most notable tracks on her new album, *Love Sask*, an album abounding in notable tracks. Clear and crisp at the same time that it's warm and compassionate, the song finds her wondering if folks in that far-away galaxy of Andromeda think, like her, about their grain-of-sand smallness, about how others can cut you down to nothing with a word, about how in spite of the mess that its inhabitants can wreak, one's home planet is a beautiful object.

In other words, *Andromeda* recalibrates your perspective on some important stuff. And gazing at that distant galaxy is a bit like growing up on the Prairies, says Kaldor.

"There's a space around people, a vista there that makes you feel small sometimes, and I think that's a really useful thing. My dad wrote something in my autograph book when I was little: 'Love many, trust few, always paddle your own canoe'." She's never forgotten that fatherly advice about independence.

Kaldor's new album is, of course, not all about Andromeda. Nor is it all about Saskatchewan, even though the record opens with the title track, a hymn to both that sweetly named village in her home province and to the province itself, and closes with the cheeky *If You Like Her Perogies (She'll Like Your Kubasa)*, those tasty dumplings being a favourite of Ukrainians who settled in the province one hundred and more years ago.

In fact the album—originally scheduled for release last year, it was put on hold after Kaldor broke her wrist—is, like the lady herself, disarmingly diverse: hip jazz, indie rock, folk, you name it.

Live performance is her métier, she says. "But recording has always been my nemesis—trying to capture the essence of what I do. I'm a performer who's defied boundaries just because of the way I write. I think this album reflects that; it's like every recording gets

"If you approached a live venue, more often than not you'd be told, 'We've already hired our one woman act'. The good news was we got incredible support from the women around us."

— Connie Kaldor reflects on her once fledgling career.

closer to reflecting that essence."

The album also reflects the complexities that accompany our drift into middle age when illness and worse start hunting those we love. While still kicking vigorously at her own traces (she says she inherited her jok-ey personality from her late father but her energy from her mother who, at 95, still lives on her own and is a fan of Skype), Kaldor has put some of that dark complexity into songs on the album.

Think of You was occasioned by the loss in 2013 of her older sister, Dianne Morrow, to a stroke. With its lines about the narrator carrying out small tasks like folding laundry and preserving jam, it captures all too well how we go on when others die because, really, what else can we do? Like other songs on the album, this one is a quietly moving testament to the small and monumental in life.

Another track, *Linda's Fighting Cancer*, tackles in the blunt language of its title the blunt reality that is the disease. She opted for such plain speaking, she says, "because (cancer) is real, and the song is about magic and real. This is part of our lives, and as a songwriter, you want to have things that fit your life."

Flash back a scant 40 years or so, and Kaldor, whether singing about Linda or anyone else, would have had a tougher time getting heard.

Born into an avidly musical family in Regina, Kaldor graduated from the University of Alberta in theatre studies in 1976. She worked with alternative theatre companies such as Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille but packed that in for her first love, music, in 1979.

However, the Canadian music industry was bad news for aspiring female artists in those days, says Kaldor. If you approached a live venue, more often than not you'd be told, "We've already hired our one woman act". The good news was we got incredible support from the women around us.

"It was a really exciting time. If you could get yourself onstage, you were singing about things nobody else was, and your audience drew to you. You felt like you were doing something important. We were working toward what we've got now—nobody thinks twice about female singer/songwriters or females in bands anymore."

The Juno-winning Kaldor has, since those pioneering days, recorded more than a dozen albums. She's written timeless songs such as *Wood River*, an ode to that southern waterway in her home province and one of her signature tunes. Kaldor has also created music for television as well as writing the story and songs for her beloved 2003 storybook CD, *A Duck in New York City*, followed by another award-winning children's work, *A Poodle in Paris*.

Hers is a musical family: husband Paul Champagne is a music producer and a member of Hart Rouge; their sons Gabriel and Aleks are musicians. They and others get credit throughout the album and especially on the choral piece *Nothing Like a Lake*.

Kaldor started writing the song at Georgian Bay in Ontario but it gathered steam and wound up referencing Canadian lakes, big and small, as well as our boreal forest. The song is, like the sky and Saskatchewan, at once grand and intimate.

She wrote it with a children's choir in mind but on the album the assembled voices are those of what Kaldor calls "the family choir" including husband, sons, and her young niece, Mia Campagne-Gallant.

"I like the thought that I have a little arts factory going on here. I've got all these ideas of things I want to do. I just want to make up things for the rest of my life."

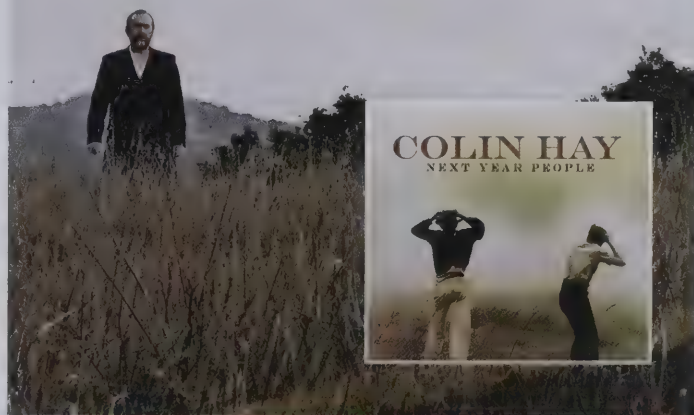
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His latest LP, *El Paseo*, is as defining a statement as he's made in his career.

By Joshua Kloke

Wil Mimnaugh's mind can't rest. He thinks big, ready to unleash his all-encompassing roots-rock at a moment's notice. Other times he's focused on matters much smaller in scale, whether it's composing the music for 30-second television commercials, as he's recently done with his celebrated Travel Alberta ads, or performing house shows in his fans' living room.

Whatever the case, the artistic output of Mimnaugh, who plays under the moniker Wil, is constantly in a state of evolution.

And he's proud of that. For the Vancouver Island-based songwriter, his tracks find different

life when performed in front of an audience.

"It's almost as if nothing's ever finished," he says of songwriting.

"I dabbled in murals and large art and a song can be finished but then you can always find ways to own it more and make it sweeter. You can do that because you can play it live. You get to the point when you tire of playing it live; like playing *Copperhead Road* has got to drive Steve Earle fucking crazy once in a while. You see those guys do those songs a little bit different."

So when Mimnaugh takes to the stage opening for legendary Guess Who vocalist Burton Cummings, it's a safe bet that the songs from his latest LP, *El Paseo*, will sound dramatically different than on record.

"You have to just serve the song and not be concerned with who is listening to the song and how it'll be listened to. I'm a big fan of a song is a song is a song," he adds.

There's an earnest thoughtfulness in the way

Mimnaugh approaches his songwriting. He's at first careful about his songs before letting them go in any direction they should.

Speaking to Mimnaugh is an exercise as well: "I don't rehearse," he jokes, when asked about the upcoming tour with Cummings. There is a pause, before breaking into laughter and quickly correcting himself. He speaks long-windedly at times but then cuts tangents short with a quick, sarcastic remark.

El Paseo is his third release and is as defining a statement as he's made in his career. His larger-than-life ambition is evident in the sweeping tracks, some of which were featured in the aforementioned Travel Alberta ads, set to sweeping imagery.

"(The songs) should hold the interest of a human being. How you choose to convey it with what you put on the song, whether it's Bavarian monk chants or heavy metal guitars, is secondary.

"That Travel Alberta stuff ended up pretty

big because it's held against very big, powerful imagery. But I'll still do those songs with me and my drummer at the shows," he adds.

You could be forgiven for thinking Mimnaugh is all over the map until it becomes evident just how much control he exerts over his artistic output.

He confesses he's always been interested in composing and through the composition work he's done, be it for Travel Alberta or otherwise, is actually a benefit to his songwriting.

"Bouncing around can also provide me a shit-load of focus on something of my own," he admits.

To him, the more time in a studio surrounding the better. That's why he chose to co-produce *El Paseo* with Jayme Langen. His hands-on approach allowed him to learn more about what he wanted and didn't out of the record.

There is an emotional heft to *El Paseo* that hasn't always been present in previous records and Mimnaugh in turn got a much clearer understanding of the process and his songs as well.

"You end up being able to explain what you're not a fan of and why you love something," he says.

Songwriting and performing isn't where Mimnaugh's artistic output ends, however. He

speaks to me from Six Degrees Studios, where he is currently doing composition work. It's an avenue he's enjoyed and has gotten tremendous feedback from, including the Travel Alberta ads. Those ads have garnered millions of views on YouTube, particularly the flagship *Remember to Breathe* ad which features *Roam*, the closing track on *El Paseo*.

"I don't read books," he says of how he got started doing composition work.

"I watch films and documentaries. Because of that I fell into a natural ability to compose songs. If I'm writing a song for a record I'll just write it, serve it, and that's that. When I'm writing I end up with visuals in my brain and that helps the process anyway."

When I question Mimnaugh on the inspiration for his songs, he brushes off the idea that inspiration comes strictly from visuals. Wil Mimnaugh is a people person, and still maintains an incredible interest in the human condition.

"I can be inspired by a film or a relationship with a person. It's a whole mixed bag of nuts. That's what songs tend to be written about, are people. We're pretty fascinating even though we have the ability to do some pretty shitty stuff."

Mimnaugh's fascination with humans doesn't

end with the writing process. For him, he believes in getting as close to the humans that mean a lot to him: his fans.

Getting back to his roots, Mimnaugh recently played a couple of house shows in Victoria and Nanaimo. But these weren't one-off, special shows for winners of a fan club contest or anything of the like. These were house shows of the simplest order: an opportunity for him to connect with his fans.

And for a man that's played a variety of stages, the house may be the place he prefers to play the most.

"I'll do them until I'm 80," he says of house shows. "If things took off and I played B.C. Place I'd probably do a house show the next day. There's something that reminds me of being young in the parties my parents used to have."

From theatres with legendary singers to the intimacy of tiny house shows, Mimnaugh continues to diversify both the stages he graces as well as his sonic output.

Mimnaugh isn't sitting still either. It may be impossible to tell what he does next. And he likes it just fine that way.

"If you sat down knowing you could only write a three-and-a-half-minute song every time, that's a bit limiting and daunting."

Look for her new single in 2015, "In The Bright Tomorrow" co-written with David Francey

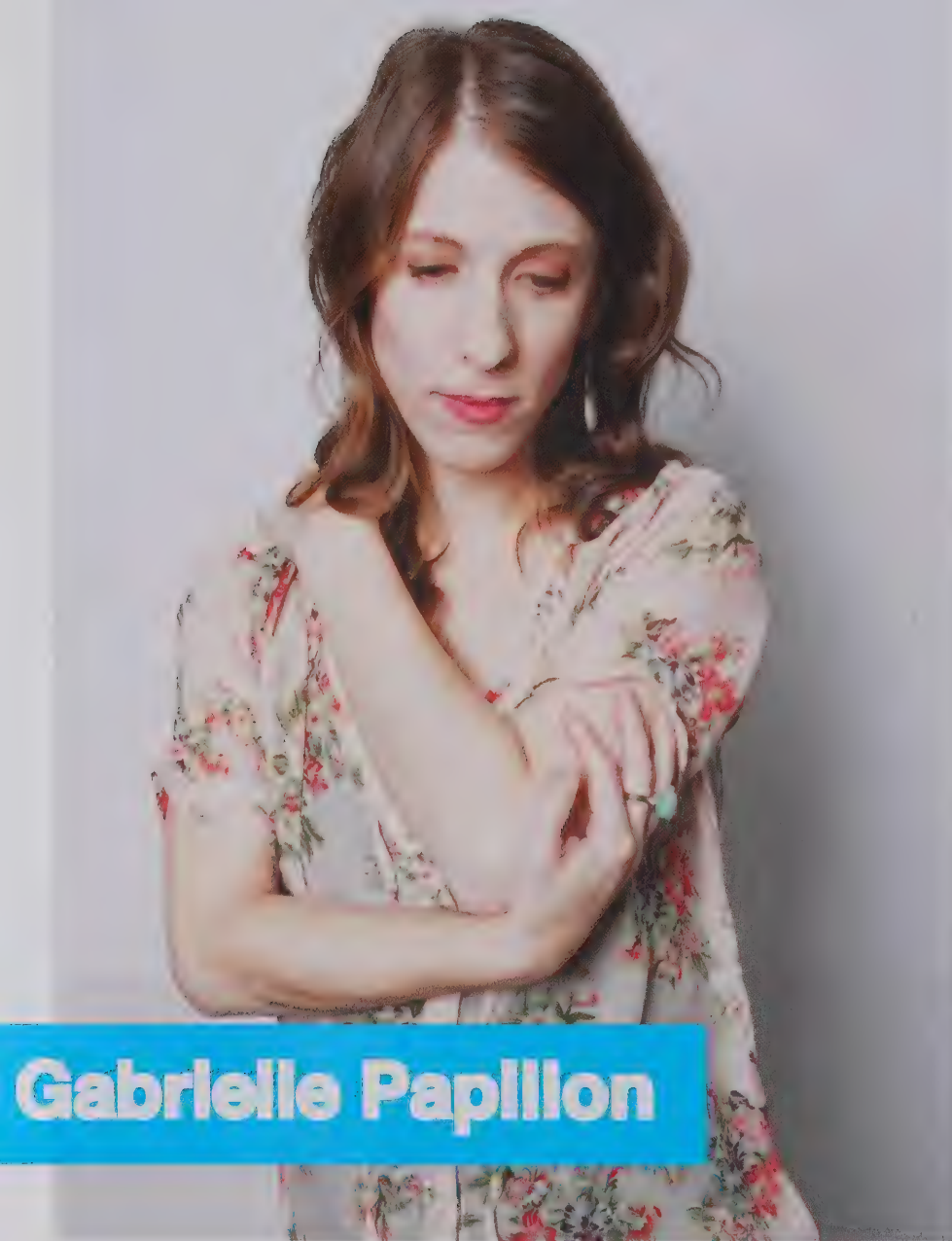
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Gabrielle Papillon

She calls the dark, urgent sounds of *The Tempest of Old* orchestral folk-pop. It's inspired by melodrama.
By Sandy MacDonald

When you've lived in Halifax long enough you will inevitably wave goodbye to friends as they head west to seek their fortune. Gabrielle Papillon is set to reverse that trend.

The singer/songwriter has been moving steadily east for the past 10 years since uprooting from her hometown Winnipeg. An eight-year pause in Montreal for some higher

learning just delayed her inevitable arrival in Halifax.

Since settling full-time there in the summer of 2013, Papillon has easily slipped into the nurturing local musical community. The city is bustling with talented young musicians working every genre from dreamy folk-pop to world-class hip-hop. Drop into a show in the Company House or Gus's Pub, Bearly's House of Blues or the Carleton, and the place will be full of musicians, coming out to support their friends onstage.

"Everybody goes to each other's shows," says Papillon. "There's just something so friendly about the Maritimes."

Papillon has tapped into that creative community to record *The Tempest of Old* (independent), her fifth studio album. It's a lush

collection of 13 original tunes, built around Papillon's silky voice, beautiful wordplay, and gorgeous arrangements.

She calls it orchestral folk-pop.

The album is a captivating confluence of lush pop and rootsy folk, not surprising given that she name-checks Bjork, Radiohead, the McGarrigle Sisters, and The Band as influences on her songwriting.

Papillon's music blossoms with the deft studio production of Daniel Ledwell. The in-demand producer and musician is the eye of the creative storm behind many top East Coast artists. Working out of his rustic Echo Lake studio outside Halifax (where he shares a home with his wife, Jenn Grant), Ledwell has produced albums for Rich Aucoin, In-Flight Safety, Fortunate Ones, Soho Ghetto, Don Brownrigg, and Grant.

"Dan is so easy to work with and so mellow," says Papillon, who worked with Ledwell on her last album, *Little Bug*. "(He) once again helped make the music I hear in my head come to life and sparkle."

Working in the little studio he built in the woods along the eastern shore of Nova Scotia, Ledwell and Papillon layered tracks of sound over her sparse acoustic guitar and guide vocals. The songs are awash with keyboards, banjo, horns, strings, guitars, autoharp, and percussion with vocal support from some terrific singers including Jenn Grant, Kim Harris, Carmel Mikol, Sean MacGillivray, and Simon Honeyman.

Ledwell is also a gifted painter with a fine arts degree from Mount Allison University—he created the nautically themed painting for the cover art of *The Tempest of Old*. He approaches producing music like making art, deftly applying layers of vocals and instrumentation to create the lush textures that enhance the central ideas of the songs.

"When I started writing music it was very simple—one guitar, easy to play and easy to convey with one person. But as I've played with more people, I've learned to master my craft as a songwriter."

The new album is a big sonic step forward. The simpler themes and arrangements of her earlier music give way to the darker, more urgent sounds on *The Tempest of Old*.

The opening track, the hypnotic *Got You Well*, sets the tone for the album. Sparse acoustic guitar, a haunting violin line, and thumping percussion behind Papillon's dark singing creates a moody, gothic vibe. Then the sound began to build—plunky banjo, a swelling wall of swampy vocals and handclaps build the intensity, and behind the growing tower of

sound is Fleur Mainville's droning fiddle. (Sadly, this project is one of the last that Mainville participated in—she died in late January at age 37.)

"I'm inspired by melodrama," explains Papillon. "I have a penchant for the melancholy anyway. I think a lot of artists do."

Papillon started writing songs shortly after she took up the acoustic guitar as a teenager. She grew up in a creative home filled with music—her mother is a photographer, her physician father played guitar, and each of her three siblings are involved in the arts.

"I learned the basic chords and just started writing songs." In 2001, while a first-year student at Concordia University in Montreal, she recorded *Songs for a Rainy Day* in a small Montreal studio that belonged to an acquaintance who had heard her play her original tunes.

"That record was an accidental thing," says Papillon, who played a couple of shows around the CD release. Then she set her music aside.

She turned her focus instead to school for several years, finally completing her MA in American history at Concordia. All the while, she barely picked up her guitar, instead pouring her considerable energy into her academic work.

In the fall of 2008, after completing her graduate thesis, the musical tap turned back on. Her muse apparently waited patiently until Papillon was ready to come back to music.

"Shortly after I finished my theses, the first complete song in almost eight years came pouring out. Music was back in my life again."

She released *The Wanderer* in 2010, and then *Currency of Poetry* a year later, which was included in *!Earshot's* Top 20 for folk and roots recordings. *Little Bug* was released in 2013, which garnered nominations for East Coast Music Awards' Folk Recording of the Year and also three Music Nova Scotia awards.

Her return to music after the academic hiatus comes with a sharpened focus in her songwriting and a more expansive vocabulary to express the nuance of her songs.

"I've developed in how I approach songwriting. I pick up on my cues better and have figured out what inspires me and when the moments are right for songwriting—it's my job now, a priority. I'm really proud of it."

Though a little later into the game than East Coast counterparts Rose Cousins and Jenn Grant, Papillon is starting to shift her career to the next level. She's planning an Atlantic Canadian tour to celebrate the new album, culminating in a Halifax CD release show on May 2.

She's getting some A-list advice from U.K. music legend Peter Jenner, who has managed some of the cream of classic rock artists including Pink Floyd, T Rex, The Clash, and lately Billy Bragg.

Papillon met Jenner at a music conference and has maintained a close friendship, often speaking by phone a few times a week. Though he's not taking on a manager's role, he has been sharing some industry secrets and helping her in getting her name farther afield.

"I'd really like this album to put me on the map and garner more international attention. Each album gets me a little farther ahead."



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Donnell Leahy & Natalie MacMaster

**Mr. and Mrs. Fiddle
record their first album
together with renowned
rock producer. Gasp!**
By Alan Kellogg

Somewhere down in the data bank of Alliterative Cliché Hell, there's a file titled First Family of Fiddlers.

Horrible though that handle—and a dozen like it—may be, you must know we are talking about Natalie MacMaster and Donnell Leahy.

Separately, the two long ago ascended to the pantheon of their chosen instrument, via the former's myriad solo endeavours and the latter's celebrated band of siblings, Leahy. Together, the married couple has produced six children, managed a farm, and put Lakefield, ON, (that's near Peterborough) on the global map. Her style is rooted in classic Cape Breton traditional, his is a less prescribed Ottawa Valley-style hybrid. Still, they are firmly grounded in the Celtic camp and proud of it.

So, it's odd unto passing strange that until this year, the duo has never released an album together. That has changed in dramatic fashion with the release of *One*, the debut MacMas-

ter-Leahy recording, backed by a tour of North America billed as *Visions of Cape Breton and Beyond*, with most of the home-schooled kids in tow—and, sometimes, onstage.

The nearly all-instrumental album was produced by the surprising duo of veteran Bob (Alice Cooper, Pink Floyd) Ezrin along with Justin (Taylor Swift, Ke\$ha) Cortelyou. That said, those anticipating an amped-up, misogynous sellout will be thwarted. For as it turns out, *One* is simply a fine collection of well-played, unsullied songs very much in the tradition, treated respectfully by all concerned. Fans will be pleased. New ones may arise.

On the line from world headquarters in bu-



colic southern Ontario, MacMaster explains the Ezrin connection.

"I was in Nashville at Johnny Reid's house. He had asked me to play on a session and afterwards we were talking about our careers and such and I mentioned our plans. He asked if he could mention it to Bob, and I said sure, never thinking he'd be interested. Five minutes after I returned home back in Ontario, he phoned. And that was it. It wasn't so much of a choice, it was a gift. He completely understood and felt our music. He's got that sense of craft—he honed, refined, enriched."

"Right from the beginning, he told us, 'this is your record, you decide'," affirms Leahy. I like

the guy, I like his taste. He is so musical, has huge ears, and heard things we missed."

As to the title, MacMaster asks where she should she begin? "Well, we are married and as such are one, this is our first record together, it's one sound and two fiddles...should I go on?"

Another first on the album is the inclusion of *Cagaran Gaolach* (lovable little darling in Gaelic)—MacMaster's debut as a vocalist on record. "That was Bob again. He heard me (sing out a fiddle part) and asked why didn't I do something on the album. Don't you sing lullabies to your kids? I said that was outside my comfort zone, and he said he could find the right mic and the right room. It was intimidating but I'm not one to squash an idea. If it failed, no biggie." And as it happened, her sweet, breathy modulations are a wholly unexpected album highlight.

One thing Ezrin didn't do was suggest the rockfied reading of *Wedding Day Jig*, originally cut on a Leahy album and composed as a present to guests of the couple's wedding 12 years ago. "That's funny," MacMaster recalls. "Bob said, 'they'll all blame me for the electric guitar', and that call was totally ours."

Another strong and poignant moment on *One is Tribute to Buddy*, a tip of the porkpie to Natalie's legendary uncle Buddy MacMaster, the master Cape Breton fiddler who passed away last August. "We did it with family and friends in one take in Cape Breton and it worked perfectly—joyous, appropriate for the real king of the jig."

The pair says the tour will be a bit different, with a video component and plenty of family participation.

"I'm excited to be going out," offers Leahy. "We're happy, healthy, and have new music, a new record. I guess I'm the 'beyond' part of (the tour title)," he deadpans.

That said, Leahy's mother is a proud daughter of Cape Breton, while the Leahys have lived around Lakefield for more than a century.

"This tour is also about the music of Cape Breton that has stood the test of time," says MacMaster. The two of us have some different influences and play differently but we grew up playing music with our parents as now our kids are doing with us. It's strongly rooted."

Indeed so. And getting this family up and around in a milieu infamous for family wrecking takes a village, as MacMaster explains.

"We couldn't do this without a lot of great help, from family and friends. I'm always wondering, how far am I pushing this? How much more can we push? We've been given an unlikely set of circumstances with both of our careers. Home schooling helps and I have

a lady who helps with that here, while on tour I do it. We have other people babysitting, providing other care, it's different every time. We do have a driver, Tony, who has been with us for 10 years. And, of course, family."

It all works out. But the couple acknowledges a recent scare. Baby Sadie, born "unexpectedly" 10 months ago, has Down Syndrome. A close call in the States has forced a decision to spare the child from the potential rigours of the road for now. "We just don't want to expose her to anything for the next few months," says MacMaster. "It'll be a downer, but it is what it is."

The other part of the family biz is the farm, with Donnell at the reins, 100 head of cattle on 50 prime acres adjacent to "ancient" Leahy land. It's in the genes, and he says there are parallels between the farm biz and the music biz.

"We have our own model. Yes, the music business has changed. But, you know, the radio has never played our music. TV exposure has helped a bit. But we started making a living by touring and selling our records offstage and basically it's still like that. It's just that we don't need to physically be in Ireland to sell our music there, since it's available in whatever format online. We can do interviews on Skype, and email files, from mixes to video. So the technology has changed but the model is much the same."

And on the latest family enterprise?

"I hope people will take away that this is an honest album, that we're not trying to be something we're not, that each tune was lovingly, carefully produced—in the best sense."





Ken Whiteley & The Beulah Band

Amazing acoustic alchemy from a masterful journeyman and a crack cast of accomplices.

By Roger Levesque

Ken Whiteley's creative curiosity seems to push him to continually explore music's many possibilities, and we're all richer for it. Heading into his 40th year as a performer, the Toronto singer, songwriter, arranger, multi-instrumentalist, and producer has traversed an amazing soundscape, sometimes discovering new tunes as much by chance as design.

Consider his latest project for Borealis Records, Ken Whiteley & The Beulah Band. Ken and his son, Ben, have been playing together off and on for more than a decade and

when they began tossing around ideas for their first-ever co-production effort in early 2014 the younger Whiteley suggested a working strategy.

"He was encouraging that this be a folksy record and to go for a greater consistency," explains Whiteley senior, "because you know, I'm pretty eclectic and I do a lot of things. I'm not going to change who I am, but after I sat down to write songs for this album Ben might say, 'make it more like a jug band,' or whatever. So we played around a lot with the feel of the songs."

And the album is consistent at least on one point: that everyone sticks pretty much to the same acoustic instruments throughout, Ken on guitars, Ben on bass, with Frank Evans (from The Slocan Ramblers) on banjo and Rosalyn Bennett (from Oh My Darling) on fiddles. But underneath that the quartet sets a wonderful pace, taking their cues from swing jazz, rural

blues, jug band grooves, country waltzes, gospel, Appalachian, or Cajun gates, and hints of the wider world, Asian influences or Hawaiian slack key, with a few good chuckles in the bargain.

As familiars to the Toronto roots scene, Evans and Winnipeg's Bennett are closer in age to Ben Whiteley but along the way they found a moving organic vocal chemistry with Ken.

"The more I got to know them the more it seemed like a really good fit, especially the way the harmony vocals really came together. You can't just buy a vocal blend. There are things you can do to tighten it up but if the voices don't blend it's never going to be great. With Frank and Ros, I felt we had that right away."

Those delicious harmonies take flight on numbers such as the Watson family's *The Lone Pilgrim* with the exotic sounds of sruti box organ and bowed strings to affect an eastern drone backdrop, one of five tunes drawn from

historical sources. Add Rev. Gary Davis's *Feel Just Like Goin' Oh* (with a tasty vocal cameo from Basia Bulat who employs Ben in her band), or the happening *Beulah Land* borrowed from the Georgia Sea Islands gospel tradition.

An original song, *Friends All Over The Place*, features a chorus with Ken's compatriot Mose Scarlett and The Good Lovelies' Caroline Brooks, among others, celebrating his musical community. Harmonies continue on the gorgeous, easy-going *How Fast Flies Time* that Whiteley co-wrote with Arthur Renwick, and again on the spare, lazy ballad *Straight To You*.

The expert tunesmith takes unexpected lyrical inspirations from all over, especially when he's mining the humour element. Hear the way he adapts an excerpt from the Tao Te Ching to the gently thumping blues of *Try Not To Fail* complete with a kooky mouth trumpet section, or the piece he first wrote for Amos Garrett called *Hands On That Guitar* that pokes fun at guitar players.

Then there's his nutty gastronomic dissertation *Indian Buffet*, geared to those of us who love Indian food. The confirmed vegetarian raves that, "A good Indian buffet is a beautiful thing". It also chimes in with his long-held interest in Eastern cultures and other global music traditions tied to previous recordings such as *One World Dance* (2007).

Whiteley spent about six months writing new songs and sorting out covers before recording began in June. His masterful guitar picking takes centre focus on much of it when he isn't strumming along in rhythm but Beulah Band's dozen tracks are truly a band effort. Evans's banjo and Bennett's fiddle get their time to shine, too, for instance, on the endearing cover of Pete Seeger's *Quite Early Morning*, which closes the album for a tribute to the recently deceased folk icon.

"He was a huge influence on me at a lot of levels. I took that off a CBC podcast I heard when he died about a year ago. I sat in with him onstage when he was 89 and just that force of spirit, it's about 'us' as opposed to 'me', about how we're all in this together. It was so moving. I sometimes do another song of his, too, *Take It From Dr. King*, about how we're blessed with what we've been given by those who've gone before and how we have a responsibility to those who come after us."

At 63, Whiteley takes that role quite deliberately, crediting examples such as Seeger and genre-crossing maestro David Amram before him, passing on his expertise to new generations. In addition to seven Juno Award nominations for his own music (two wins), Whiteley has chalked up two Grammy nods and another 22 Juno nominations as a record producer, often for Borealis, the label he helped found nearly 20 years back.

Born in Pennsylvania but a resident of Canada from age five, he grew up amidst a legacy of career musicians including his older brother, Chris, and now his niece Jenny, and son Ben. Following his public debut at 14 in a Yorkville jug band, he took in his first Mariposa Folk Festival in 1969. He returned to play Mariposa in 1972 in the now-legendary Original Sloth Band, which found notoriety across North America.

That was just the start of his life-long collaboration with so many other musicians. Today Whiteley's name is attached to about 150 records in some context.

"I sometimes joke that I never went to university, I went to folk festivals instead, starting from when I was 13 years old. I think that's where I absorbed the idea, that there are connections between musics all over the world, that the lines which divide us are pretty arbitrary, and that music has the capacity to bridge some of those lines. I remember being up in the highlands of Haiti in the late '70s with my guitar where no one spoke English and my Canadian French was useless, too, but we could play music and sing together."

For a guy who found his 'promised land' in music decades ago, the Beulah Band seems to be one of the most satisfying encounters yet.



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Niladri Kumar



SAT | JUN 7 | 8pm | VITCAL | ROYAL ALBERTA MUSEUM

Indrani Mukherjee



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Raman Kalyan

2015 CONCERT SEASON

A portrait of Pieta Brown, a woman with dark, wavy hair, looking slightly to the side. She is wearing a colorful, patterned top. The background is dark and out of focus, with some green foliage visible on the left.

Pieta Brown

The Beat Generation ethos of beatitude led to her soulful, passionate *Paradise Outlaws*.

By J. Poet

“I’ve been writing songs for as long as I can remember,” Pieta Brown says, speaking from the living room of her home in Iowa. Brown is the oldest daughter of folksinger Greg Brown and, although she grew up in a home surrounded by music and musicians, it took a while for her to get comfortable with the idea of becoming a performing songwriter.

“I had the drive to become a songwriter early on,” Brown recalls. “I wrote in my notebook before school every morning and played piano when I was a girl. I was really shy, but I felt

that creative impulse and I could feel my dad’s power as an artist. He’s a great songwriter and musician and has that artistic aura about him. He didn’t intimidate me, but his artistry made me careful about what I put out into the world.”

Brown’s attention to the details of songwriting made her postpone her career until she was in her late 20s.

“I held myself to high standards, which you should do anyway, no matter who your mom or dad is.” She began honing her songwriting skills at open mics in Tucson, AZ.

When she had a couple of songs she was satisfied with, she put them on a cassette and sent them to her dad and Bo Ramsey, her dad’s producer and guitar player. Ramsey called her up whooping and hollering. “He told me we should make a record, and we did.”

Brown’s eponymous debut, produced by Ramsey and released in 2002, launched a career that’s gone from strength to strength. Since then, she’s made six albums full of soulful,

haunting music, including her most recent, *Paradise Outlaw*, a record that was partially inspired by the poets and writers of the Beat Generation.

“I reread [Alan Ginsberg’s] *Howl*, and found lyrics for *Painter’s Hands* and *Rise My Only Rose* stuck in between the pages. Soon after, I found a copy of *Paradise Outlaws*, a book about the Beat Generation, with photos of the poets and essays by John Tytell. I loved the energy of the book and it was by my side while I was writing the songs. The idea that the Beats had, that peace, love, and universal love should motivate your actions in the world, was appealing. They may be ideals we can’t attain as a society, but keeping them in mind and doing the best we can struck a chord with me.”

The songs on *Paradise Outlaw* are sung with a low-key intensity that captures the Beat ethos of beatitude, the quiet feeling that life is worth living despite its many sorrows. On *Rise My Only Rose*, Brown asks if you can “suffer

without suffering”, a question implicitly addressed in most of the songs. Her gentle vocals and Bo Ramsey’s shimmering, twang-heavy guitar fills create an unsettling tension on the introspective lyrics of *Wondering How*, a meditation on the deeper meaning of life, and the funereal blues of *Back To You*, wherein the longing for a relationship that will never work out overwhelms all feeling, save the primal need for connection. The songs are drenched with passionate feelings, balanced by an almost ambient musical background.

“You don’t need to rock out to deliver strong emotion,” Brown says. “I wanted a quiet album, one you could listen to intensely if you’re alone, or put on in the next room and let the music flow around you. I wanted to address that common human feeling we all have of being an outsider, looking in on everything that’s going on in the world. That sense of craving something you know you can never have, even though there’s some strange comfort in being an outsider.”

Life on the road as a performing songwriter can intensify those feelings of being an outsider, but Brown’s formative years gave her an artistic temperament that sustains her devotion to her chosen path. “My great-grandfather played banjo and my great-grandmother played pump organ. The whole family would sit around and jam with a real rural mountain sound that became part of me. My first experiences of playing music together were watching my dad jamming with my family. We lived in a shack outside of town and hauled water in from outside. I took baths in a tub with water heated on our wood stove; very rustic. My parents were looking for a cheap way to live, so my dad could follow his muse.”

When Greg Brown’s career took off, he was away from home most of the time. Her parents divorced and Pieta moved to Alabama with her mother. She kept writing songs. “In my early 20s, I experimented with the banjo, but despite the guitars that were all around the houses I grew up in, they always seemed like mysterious, awesome instruments.”

The turning point came in her mid 20s.

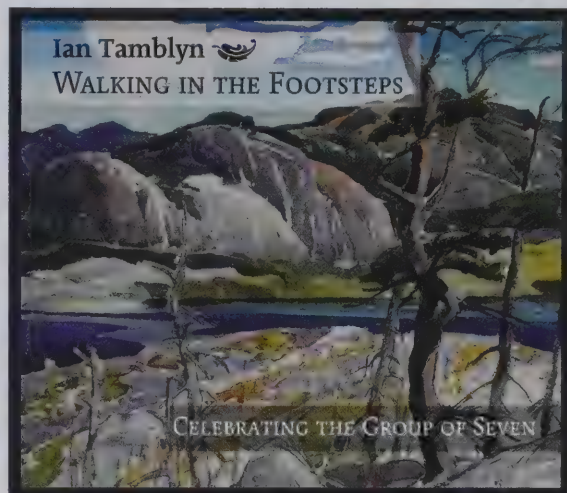
“I was visiting my dad. He showed me a 1930s arch-top guitar he had. I’d picked up guitars before but I didn’t even know how to strum a C chord. When I held that guitar, something happened. I took it upstairs, tuned it to an open tuning—all by ear—and once I did that, I said, ‘OK, here we go!’ I went out, got a guitar book and messed around with open tunings. Once I connected with that guitar, I knew I was going to write songs and make a record. The music struck something in me that was deeper than the scales and notes and chords.

“The songs come through me, not out of me,” she says. “I’ve heard a lot of songwriters say that you feel like you’re just a delivery mechanism. The artistry is being open to your feelings and getting in touch with them, then catching that wave, following the buzz to the melody. Sometimes it feels like the lyric has been there in the back of your mind all your life, but I don’t think about it very much. When the music takes me, I just feel my way through it.”



Ian Tamblyn

Walking in the Footsteps



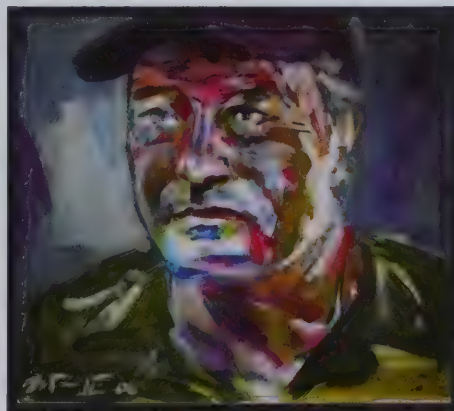
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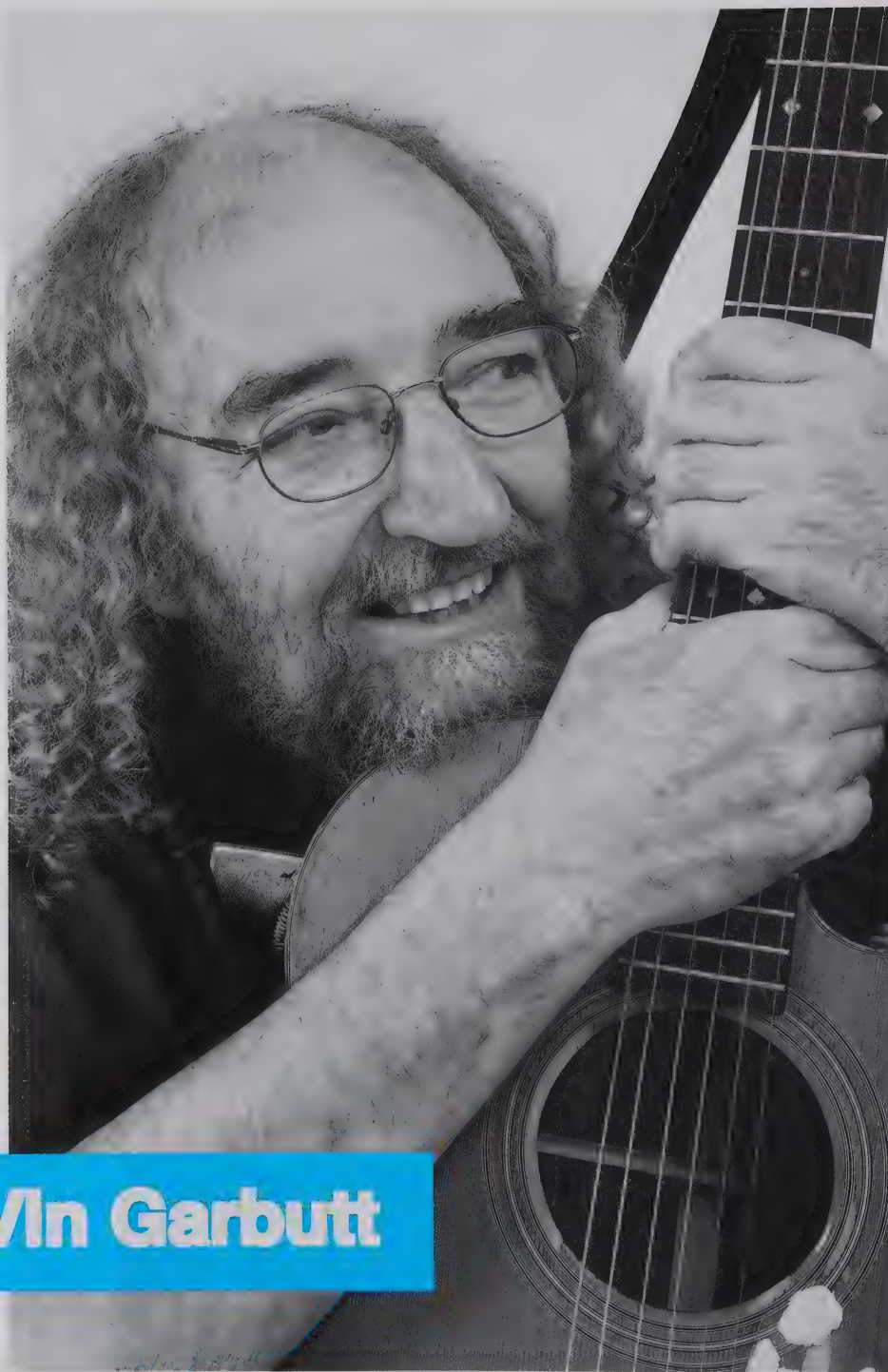
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Vin Garbutt

One of the all-time great raconteurs of folk music records his first album in a decade.

By Tim Readman

Nobody introduces a folk song like Vin Garbutt. Absolutely nobody. He is one of the great, great patter merchants in the business. Watching Garbutt engage an audience ought to be a mandatory

requirement for any fledgling performer. Hilarious without being ribald, often self-deprecating, he tells wonderful stories about the current state of his health and the idiosyncrasies of living in the north of England.

Accompanying himself on guitar and tin whistle, he tours the world constantly in demand from Calgary to Canberra. Blessed with a powerful and emotive voice his songs cover topics such as exploitation, unemployment, war, and oppression. He also sings some of the funniest songs you'll ever hear. One minute he'll move you to tears, the next he'll have you

falling off your chair with laughter.

And he's just released *Synthetic Hues* – his first record release in 10 years. It's a bit surprising that someone of his stature should have such a gap between albums, so why the long wait?

"The reason I hadn't done one since *Persona Grata* was because I was honestly just sick of the business side. My CDs totally disappeared from the shops by about 1985. I lost interest in recording and everything that goes with it. I was selling CDs fine at gigs and later on CD Baby. Then in May of last year I did a gig in Durham City with Johnny Handle and Tom Gilfellon and there was a feller there called Anthony Robb, a Northumbrian piper of some note. He sent me an email saying he'd retired from teaching and bought himself a state-of-the-art studio in Sedgefield, County Durham. He said, 'I really enjoyed the concert and any time you want to use my studio gratis just come and use it'. So I went over to see him and he had a beaut studio. I prefer an audience—I'm a live performer. I'm not that happy in a studio but he was so enthusiastic. When I finished a song he'd rush in saying he loved it and ask where I got it. So singing down the microphone was like singing to an audience. I need feedback and I was getting it from just the other side of the glass. It was great!"

You can hear the rising excitement in his unmistakable Teesside voice as he warms to the topic. "I even fancy making another one now. Anthony's enthusiasm has got me going—I'd use him again."

I ask how he chose the material. "Most of the songs I've been singing for years and never recorded. *The Lass of Cockerton* I learned in the '70s. It's by Rudyard Kipling, I recorded on *Little Innocents* but did it unaccompanied. I have a guitar part I really like now so I did it again. *No Man's Land*—often called *The Green Fields of France*—is a song I'd never have dreamt of attempting. It's been sung so well, and so badly, by hundreds of people but they specifically asked me if I'd sing it on a tribute album of covers of Eric Bogle songs for a charitable trust in Australia. I'm pleased to say Eric, who I know pretty well, got in touch and said it was the best track on the album, so that thrilled me. You can't put that in the interview, though, 'cause it sounds a bit big-headed-ish."

Still endearingly modest after all these years, Vin has never been interested in becoming famous in the accepted sense. His success has happened without hype from record companies, and without publicity from the mass media. He expresses some reservations about the current state of folk music. He identifies the emergence of an axis of power in the U.K. scene,

including certain folk magazines, broadcasters, awards shows, record labels, and distributors, which is putting a stranglehold on the scene. He believes that this 'cartel' has a monopoly and is promoting a narrow representation of what is out there.

"There's what I call serial award winners—they've all done very well and they are all very good but it's a shame about all the exclusions. There's so much talent about but they don't get a look in because they don't have the connections."

The conversation moves on to his *Teesside Troubadour* documentary DVD. It came about in a similar manner to *Synthetic Hues* with renowned filmmaker Craig Hornby playing the role of creative catalyst. It tells Vin's story with footage from around the world; combining fly-on-the-wall, rare archive and live concert scenes, plus candid interviews with family, friends, and peers.

"When it came out it filled the big cinema in Middlesbrough. I went and sang, too, and it sold more seats than all the big movies at the time. They wanted me to do some more dates. It sold out each time and went down really well. Then the latest Harry Potter film came out and knocked me off my perch! I've sold loads of DVDs all over the world but it never got to the shops. I'm still 'Vin Who?' in the business."

That gets him going about being in what he calls the 'media shadow'.

"There's not many folkies in the media spotlight. Most of them in the '60s were based in London where the media is. Martin Carthy, John Renbourn, Bert Jansch, John Martyn, Maddy Prior, Tim Hart, Steeleye and all the Fairport lads were all based there. I always lived in Teesside and was in the media shadow so I didn't get a look in. Now there's Mumford & Sons, who the folk world had never heard of but the media class as a folk band. I listened to one or two tunes and I quite liked them but I wouldn't class it as a folk band. It's pop but they've just got a banjo in it."

Recently it looked like he might briefly emerge from that shadow when *Sky TV Arts* came calling.

"They were doing interviews and then having various rock stars comment upon the performer being interviewed. They came to one of my gigs and filmed the sound check and interviewed me. The producer thought it was a great idea but a few weeks later he got in touch apologetically and explained that the rock stars, whoever they were, couldn't comment because they'd never heard of me! So that was the end of that—but that's show biz, isn't it?"

So there you have it, ladies and gentlemen—the Vin Garbutt enigma. Well-known, well-loved but never famous. I end by asking how he's doing since his recent lay-off due to illness.

"I can't complain. Currently my diary is full. I start again in April and I'm chock-a-block until the new year. I don't want any more gigs!" he says with a laugh. "Despite this media shadow, I do know I have had a better career than a lot of people who are in the media spotlight. I have had more concerts and more consistent work over the years."



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Frazey Ford

Al Green meets Dolly Parton as the former Be Good Tanya records in Memphis with legendary session musicians. By Tom Murray

If not for a quick stop for fuel in Memphis, Frazey Ford's latest album, *Indian Ocean*, most likely wouldn't have happened in the manner that it did.

Especially since it wasn't Ford stopping to gas up, it was writer and documentarian Robert Gordon, author of *It Came From Memphis*, and Grammy Award-winning writer of the liner notes for the Big Star box set *Keep an Eye on the Sky*. Entranced by a song he heard coming over the radio, he waited until the end so he could find out who he was listening to. The

plan was foiled because of the sound of a tire blowing up and obscuring the DJ's voice, so he phoned the station to get the info he needed.

The artist was Ford, the song was a track off her 2010 release, *Obadiah*. While Ford had built up a reputation as a roots writer with the Be Good Tanyas, the solo number Gordon heard hinted at something that Gordon was intimately familiar with, soul music. As soon as he got home he fired off an email to Ford, offering to set her up with several of his musician friends, including the members of Hi Rhythm, who worked as the rhythm section on Al Green's most notable '70s records.

"I was so in shock about the whole idea," Ford confesses over the phone from her Vancouver home. "I'm not someone who contacts people to play with; I tend to keep to whoever happens to be in my life. It was pretty intense. I was so put out that it actually wasn't until after we made the record that I realized what I had just done, and who I had played with."

To be precise, she played with the Hodges brothers: keyboardist Charles, bassist Leroy, and guitarist Mabon (Teenie) Hodges, who passed away in June. The trio was responsible for much of the magic behind songs such as *Let's Stay Together* and *Love and Happiness*, important records to Ford from an early age. It should also be noted that Ford's regular band of Darren Parris, Craig MacCaul, and Leon Power were substantial contributors to the final mix as well, with the singer bringing tracks back and forth between Vancouver and Memphis.

"I obsessively studied Al Green's singing style," she laughs. "I always wanted to be a soul singer but I didn't sound like one, probably because I grew up singing country with my mom, and that's just what comes out of me. When people hear the album they say, 'Oh, she sings soul' but that's what I've been trying to do the whole time!"

In truth, *Indian Ocean* isn't, strictly speaking, a soul album and it only bares a passing

resemblance to much of the retro funky brass records being released these days. What Ford has done (with the help of co-producer John Raham) is bring her country roots to the Hi Rhythm sound, much as Al Green brought his own eccentric phrasing back in the late '60s, early '70s. The result is accurately summed up by Ford as "Dolly Parton hanging out with Al", a synthesis that works on more levels than you can possibly get in a few listens.

"The approach was to be as natural as we could be," says Ford, who points out that the bed track for opening cut *September Fields* was done in just a couple of passes. "Teenie was talking about something he called a 'head session', which is a phrase I'd never heard before, but described something I always liked to do, which was to go in without hearing the music in advance and just doing what felt right. Like, if I do backups for someone I always tell them not to bother sending the song; I like to just go in and see what we get in the first couple of takes. So, in that way, I completely related to Teenie and the other guys because that's how they operated as well."

Something else that Ford gleaned from hanging out with the brothers was a sense of what a life in music entails. While celebrated for their instrumental prowess, the Hodges never became wealthy off their musical endeavours. In comparison to the musicians who made up the Funk Brothers or the Wrecking Crew, the brothers have remained cult figures to many.

"They've had hard lives, and in addition to the actual recording session it was something of an education for me," Ford says. "There's

not a lot of glory left over from their heyday. They've all had to work at other things, like Charles, who is a preacher. They don't have any money and they're in their late '60s; they have health problems. They're still so good, though, and so humble about what they do."

Ford feels that the brothers added just the right touch of underlying warmth and joy to songs that she describes as heavy on topics like death and abuse.

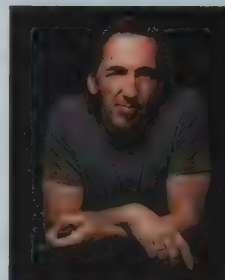
"I didn't realize that the material was as intense as it was until we got it in the studio. It made me wonder what these soul legends would do with them. What they did was respond honestly, and what that made me realize was that there was nothing you couldn't bring to a song as long as it comes from a real place. There was nothing so heavy that they couldn't bring something beautiful to it. I think it was because they come out of that tradition; Memphis can be a hard town, but maybe that's the reason why so much beautiful music has come out of it."

Now that Ford has gotten *Indian Ocean* out of the studio and on the road, and worked out the logistics of paring down such a layered album, she's been enjoying playing it with her regular band.

"Everybody in the group is steeped in that music anyways, so it wasn't too hard," she notes. "We just needed to go through and find out what to keep from the mix. Now that we've figured out how to play it live with five musicians it's a bit of a relief, and it's taken on a new life out of the box; I've been having so much fun playing these songs."



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Songwriting Workshop with

Stephen Fearing & Linda McRae

This year we are pleased to announce this year's mentors for the Pre Fest Songwriting Workshop will be the Canadian Music Legends Stephen Fearing and Linda McRae. Stephen Fearing, who is well known for his solo work, as well as with Blackie and Rodeo Kings, says that "there are many different opinions on how to write a 'good' song and taste is always a matter of opinion. However, there are fundamental ingredients, vital to creating a great song and ways of approaching songwriting, which have stood the test of time in all genres of western music." In this workshop, which is co-led by veteran songwriter and past member of Spirit of the West, Linda McRae, participants will spend time defining and examining those 'fundamental ingredients' of a song through performance, discussion and hands-on writing.

Funding Available through FACTOR's Songwriter's Workshop Program, as well as through Island Mountain Arts.

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A photograph of Norman Blake, a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a light-colored shirt and a wide-brimmed hat. He is playing a dark-colored acoustic guitar. The background is a lush, green, out-of-focus forest. A blue banner with white text is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

Norman Blake

**One of America's iconic acoustic guitarists prefers to talk about trains or hoop cheese rather than his new record, *Wood Wire & Words*.
By Glen Herbert**

“It’s kind of a downer if you listen to the words,” says Norman Blake about his new album, titled *Wood, Wire & Words*. He’s having a bit of fun—he laughed as he said that—and when pressed he admits that it’s just that, throughout his career, he’s been less interested in artifice and more interested in telling stories, in shining a light on a more intimate history of American life. He writes about the small struggles, joys, and doubts, and troubles that, while they may not have affected the life of the nation, have nevertheless shaped the context of his life. In *The Incident at Condra Switch*, Blake tells a story of a murder along the railroad. “I came to that through a railroad history-type book. That happened closed to home, about 35 miles

from here, though it’s not common knowledge. I hardly found anyone who knows anything about it. It was written down in some railroad history.” But, of all the stories he could tell, why that one? “It’s close to home.”

Certainly “home” is the thing that has attracted his attention throughout his life and has informed his writing throughout his career. Home, of course, is Sulphur Springs, GA, a rural community near Chattanooga where Blake has lived his entire life. Calling him there is a bit like calling Garrison Keillor in Lake Wobegon, or John Updike in Brewer, PA, the exception being that Blake writes about himself and he writes about a real place. His first album was titled *Home in Sulphur Springs*, a concept he reprised in 2006 with *Back Home in Sulphur Springs*. This latest recording takes up the same theme, again turning our attention to the small, intimate details of life in small-town America.

The irony, perhaps, is that it is from the close intimacy of Sulphur Springs that he set out to participate, if reluctantly, in some of the moments that have defined and redefined roots and Americana music. He was there at the recording of *Will the Circle Be Unbroken* (which Eve Goldberg profiled in the last issue of this magazine). He played on *Nashville Skyline*, that great outlier in the Bob Dylan catalogue. He

played on John Hartford’s positively seismic recording *Aereoplane*, which created the space and the inspiration for what we now think of as newgrass. He was a fixture on Johnny Cash’s television show, one that renewed interest in the music of the Carter Family, and unabashedly provided a venue for a number of musicians who, at the time, were all but banned from prime-time television. In 2000, he recorded for the *O Brother Where Art Thou* soundtrack; in 2007 he took part in Robert Plant and Allison Krauss’s recording *Raising Sand*. The only significant event he missed, seemingly, was the Bristol sessions. Though, had he been alive in 1927, he probably would have sat in with Jimmie Rodgers and The Carter Family, too.

If all of that is impressive—and certainly it is—any sense of awe is entirely lost on Blake himself. “I don’t think about any of that,” he says. “You know, I was really not trying to be on [the *Circle* recording]. I wasn’t feeling good—I was ill after a road trip with [John] Hartford, and I kinda got roped into that and I ended up being on it. I’m glad at this point that I was but, you know, it was not something I was trying to do. I was trying to get out of doing it.

“And I almost didn’t do *O Brother*,” again by trying to get out of it. “I’ve never been able

"I try to more than just accompany a song. Every tune has a particular individuality, and you can find something that fits with it."

— Norman Blake

to see these things; hindsight is twenty-twenty or whatever they say. But the album with John, *Aereoplane*, you know, we were just trying to make a living at that point, but I guess I was just in the right place at the right time on some of these things."

In speaking with him, it becomes obvious that he'd much rather talk about trains, or murder ballads, or hoop cheese, which he mentions in *Grady Forester's Store*. "The store is real, and a photograph of it is included in the liner notes of *Wood, Wire & Words*. "I was going there when I was a little boy to get the mail and stuff. That picture was made in '43, and I was born in '38, so I was going down there then. There was no electricity or nothing down there along the railroad.

"In the old days, cheese came in wooden hoops" [in his accent it rhymes with hook], "like a banjo ring. It was about four inches thick, usually. You had this wooden ring, and the cheese was in that. A circle of cheese. And you'd go to a store, like that song's about, and they would cut you some and sell it to you. But it laid around unrefrigerated for quite a time."

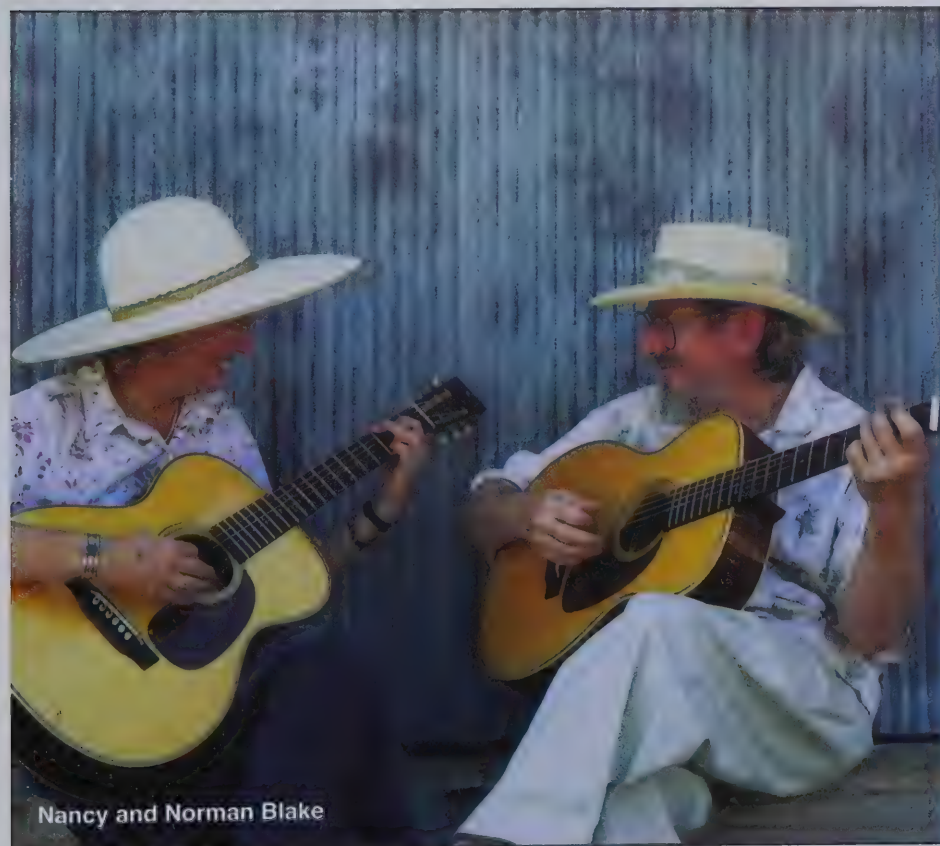
In the song there are cats sleeping on the flour

sacks, the crackers are stale, and by the third verse the dog, Prince, is run over and killed by the ice truck. "That's all true! There is some humour there. It's tainted, I guess. But all of that really happened just like in the song.... You know, this particular place had its drawbacks. We were living in a very rural part of the country, down on the dirt road, so to speak. It was the good old days but it was pretty rough-shod as well."

His guitar playing has been rightly celebrated for decades, and it remains as strong, comfortable, and honest as ever, seen best in the instrumentals included on the new album, a standout perhaps being *Blake's Rag*. He's not out to impress us with licks but to capture a feeling.

"I don't care for a lot of hype about things, especially when it's concerned with something that I do... It's whatever comes out. I try to more than just accompany a song. Every tune has a particular individuality, and you can find something that fits with it."

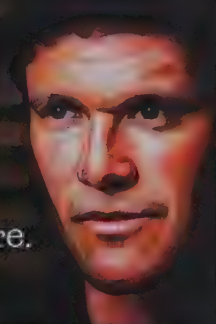
He's retired now, or at least retired from the road, and he realizes that the songs on this album are not of a kind that will attract the attention of radio DJs. He made it because he wants to tell us about hoop cheese, the railroad, and the lights on the river. He's always maintained that his music has never been just his job, it's also part of his life. Thankfully, he's allowed it to be part of ours as well.



Nancy and Norman Blake

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- 26 **Gallery House Concerts** Calgary AB
- 27 **T.Rex Discovery Theater** Eastend SK
- 28 **Grassroots Concerts** Regina SK
- 29 **Carmen Arts Council** Carmen MB
- 30 **WECC** Winnipeg MB

- may -

- 1 **Roots at Rustys** Inglis MB
- 2 **Bon Temps** Saskatoon SK
- 3 **R.Ouse Concerts** Strathcona AB
- 4 **Olive Concerts** Jasper AB
- 5 **Ratzlaf Concerts** Golden BC
- 6 **Fratters Speak Easy** Red Deer AB
- 7 **The Root** Lloydminster SK
- 8 **Mercury Room** Edmonton AB
- 9 **Barnyard Concerts** Millarville AB
- 10 **Legacy Guitars** Cochrane AB
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Ramblin' On

Old-time music aficionados Pharis and Jason Romero's heart-warming new release seamlessly blends the vintage folk, country, and acoustic blues they recorded in a make-shift studio in the Cariboo Mountains.

By Roddy Campbell

Horsefly, British Columbia, pop. 1000. This remote village in the foothills of the Cariboo Mountain Range seems an unlikely setting for one of the most prestigious custom banjo makers in the world to set up shop. Appalachia it ain't. But the J. Romero Banjo Co. ships its exquisite, custom-made instruments from scenic Horsefly to such celebrated musicians as Ricky Skaggs, Jerry Douglas, and Martin Simpson.

These banjos make glorious music in the right hands, natch. And master Jason Romero can knock out a splendid tune or two, especially in the company of his missus and business partner, acoustic guitarist Pharis Romero—recipient of the Canadian Folk Music Awards' Traditional Singer of the Year in 2013, no less. And there's more where that came from, too, methinks.

You see, Pharis and Jason just released their third album, *A Wanderer I'll Stay*—a triumphant, seamless, heart-warming amalgamation of classic folk, acoustic blues, vintage country, and old-time tunes from the likes of Buell Kazee, Charley Willis, and Luke Jordan. And it all comes wrapped in those blessed harmonies and formidable banjo playing.

A Wanderer I'll Stay, though, proves a bit of a departure from its predecessors *Lone Gone Out West Blues* (2013) and *A Passing Glimpse* (2011), as it includes, for the first time, such guest musicians as Josh Rabie (fiddle), John

Hurd (bass), Brent Morton (drums), and Marc Jenkins (pedal steel), all of whom add a sophisticated spit and polish that contributes considerably to the duo's accomplished, new maturity.

"This is still a Jason and I album," says Pharis on the phone mid-tour from Wales. "I feel we put out two strong duet albums and really established ourselves. We just love playing with other people so much that we wanted to express that love on this album. We thought, 'OK, let's bring in some other musicians to play on our original material, especially'. *There's No Companion* or *Poor Boy* changed once we got the band playing on them. That was really fun, to have other musicians come in and feel the songs adjust and change until we all found our tone as a group. That was thrilling, definitely."

As with its acclaimed predecessor, *Lone Gone Out West Blues*, the Romeros wrote the majority of *A Wanderer I'll Stay*. Pharis, in particular, appears to be on a creative roll, turning her hand to six new songs since the birth of their daughter, Indigo Hope Romero, in October 2013.

"I actually surprised myself this past year with how much I managed to write," says she. "Having a new baby, being busy with the banjo shop, and busy on tour, I didn't think I was going to have any time to write songs. But I'd be sitting there, breastfeeding my daughter, or lulling her to sleep, or whatever, and these songs would come out.

"I have to write almost the entire song in my

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head and hang on for a moment to get two hands free. You know, all of those new songs have been written in the last year and a half. Jason and I have been doing a lot more writing together, which has been thrilling. He's been writing more tunes as well. It's been great. You know, when you're busier, somehow you get more done. That seems to apply very much to our life right now. We're working hard. We're doing a lot."

Naturally enough, living in such a small, out-of-the-way community common themes crop up in Pharis's lyrics. Here's a clue: *Lonely Home Blues*, *New Lonesome Blues*, *Lonesome And I'm Going Back Home...* Travel, too, pops its head above the parapet. For starters there's *A Wanderer I'll Stay* and *Lone Gone Out West Blues*, yes? But she's also partial to a good grim tale. Her wonderful *Ballad Of Old Bill*, for instance, tells of a reclusive, eccentric neighbour eaten by a bear.

"I'd known him forever," says Pharis. "He worked out in the woods, a trapper, grew his own food, made his own herbal medicine, and had a beautiful apple orchard. He was a little bit ornery but he grew these incredible flowers. Whenever he'd come to town, he'd stop at the houses of all the unmarried women and bring them bouquets of flowers. So he was just really special in a lot of people's hearts."

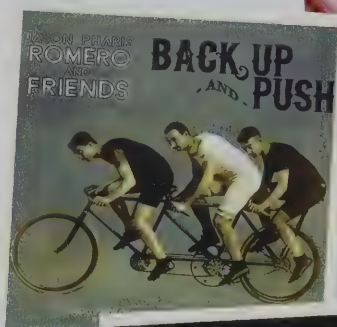
"He was found in his apple orchard mostly eaten by a bear. No one knows if he had a heart attack first and then got eaten, or if he got attacked, or what happened. But it had a pretty big impact on everybody around here, the fact that this was how he had gone. And it's going to sound very strange for me to say this, but it was kind of the only way he could have gone. He was in his 70s. There's no way he could have moved into an old-age home in town. So that story's been rolling around in my head for a year now. I finally got all the words out, handed it over to Jason and said, 'Here, run with it'. And he came up with this really great clawhammer tune."

A Wanderer I'll Stay was recorded in Jason's banjo workshop in Horsefly, where David Travers-Smith set up a remote recording studio complete with an assortment of elaborate vintage microphones. Travers-Smith had mixed and mastered *Lone Gone Out West Blues*. His credits also include albums by Jane Siberry, The Wailin' Jennys, Mary Jane Lamond, Ruth Moody... Basically, he and the band encamped with the Romeros for the duration. Apparently, a good time was had by all.

"We cleaned up the workshop entirely, covered everything up with sheets, put away all the tools, put a whole bunch of carpet down, put in a bunch of baffling, padding and blankets on all the windows and walls in a part of the studio that has a nice high ceiling, set up a bunch of microphones, and went for it."

"We were looking for somebody who could capture the natural sounds of our instruments and of our voices. With these excellent pre-amps, and these really great microphones that David had, we were able to really get the solid base sounds of what we do right from the very start."

"My mom came up to Horsefly and stayed with us the



whole time we were recording, looked after our little daughter, and fed us all amazing food. We all ate meals together. We all made music together. It wasn't us walking into some strange studio, staying in a hotel, or sleeping on someone's floor while we were recording. There was no pressure. We'd go in, record a few songs, go for a [cross-country] ski, eat some food, drink, and then maybe record something else. It was very relaxing."

And it shows. This is a beautifully produced record.

And the essence of its soul lies in the old-time music that drew Pharis and Jason together in the first place. Avid record collectors both, they are constantly informed of new field recordings or new collections available on the Internet through the likes of the Digital Library of Appalachia or the Smithsonian. One of their great treasures is the *Paramount Record Collection* released in 2013 by Jack White's label, Third Man Records. It includes 800 tracks from 1917 to 1928 made by the likes of Louis Armstrong, Ma Rainey, Fletcher Henderson, Blind Lemon Jefferson, and Jelly Roll Morton.

"You know, I absolutely love Beck," says Pharis. "There's a lot of new music that we're listening to that we just get a huge kick out of but we always go back to the roots. I swear there are only a couple of degrees of separation between Jay-Z and the Carter Family."



Those really early days of recording, there's so much unique stuff going on, so much powerful, beautiful, simple music. Every time I go back to that stuff I just get inspired.

"Of course, you're listening to it with a certain set of ears, always going, 'Oh, that's an interesting song, maybe we should work that one up'. But just sit back and let it sort of wash over you, having this deep sense of informing you, what you're doing in the rest of your musical career, I feel like that can't be beat. I really feel like going back to those early recordings is an essential thing to do for almost any musician. We spend a lot of time listening."

One of the outstanding highlights of *A Wanderer I'll Stay* is Jason's treatment of the western classic *Goodbye Old Paint*, first collected

by Jack Thorp in 1921 from the African-American cowboy Charley Willis.

"So many traditional tunes, for me, have been done so perfectly that they're untouchable," says Jason. "It's tough sometimes to pick an old traditional tune. But sometimes I'll pick one, like *Cumberland Gap* or *Sally Goodin*, that's been done so many times that it's safe for reinterpretation. I sometimes feel like I have a little more freedom with those ones, rather than trying to find one that hasn't been done that much that you don't really want to mess with because it's so precious. I do like to find an old tune and reinterpret the way that I hear it."

Jason Romero grew up in Colusa, CA, and had no particular interest in music until he walked into a bar in nearby Chico. A local band was onstage playing Irish music anchored by the five-string banjo player Steve Lewis. It was like an epiphany.

"When you first see one played well live, you can kind of go off the deep end. [Steve] became my teacher. I took maybe six months worth of lessons, and that was the start for me. I got a nice grounding on the instrument."

The usual suspects—Bela Fleck and Tony Trischka—provided his initial inspiration. And when he took up fine woodworking as a trade, in his spare time he tried his hand at making banjos. Obviously, this got out of hand, particularly when he took one of his prototypes to the Wildwood Banjo Company. They more or less hired him on the spot. And as Jason's prowess as an instrument maker progressed so, too, did his interest in old-time banjo music.

"My interest in the instrument itself got quite a bit deeper and that took me to the pre-bluegrass era of music, which opened up a huge range of

Win a Copy of Frazey Ford's *Indian Ocean*



Frazey Ford's first gig with the Be Good Tanyas was busking outside Lilith Fair in Vancouver. Who knew she would eventually wind up signed to Nettwerk Records, founded by the Fair's central figure, Sarah McLachlan?

While the Tanya's released three albums before running out of steam, Ford has found her feet as a solo performer releasing *Obadiah*, an album inspired by the likes of Al Green and Neil Young. Fortune smiled and now her latest disc, *Indian Ocean*, features the legendary Memphis Hi Rhythm session musicians used

by Green for such hits as *Let's Stay Together* and *I'm Still In Love With You*.

Nettwerk Records has very kindly donated six copies of *Indian Ocean* for some knowledgeable readers to win. To receive one, correctly answer the questions below and email them to penguineggs@shaw.ca. Put Frazey Ford Contest as the subject.

And please, don't forget to include a mailing address and a proper contact name in order for us to forward your disc. Failure to do so will result in disqualification. Good luck.

Q 1: Which singer/songwriter gave the Good Be Tanyas their name?

Q 2: Which British rock star did the Tanya's sample on their debut album?

Q 3: Who is the noted producer Hi Rhythm worked with in the '70s?

Answers to the Leonard Cohen *Popular Problems* contest are: Q1: *Death of a Ladies' Man*, Q2: *I'm Your Fan*, Q3: Edmonton, AB.

And the winners are: Janet Brush, Halifax, NS; Joseph Granacki, Fonthill, ON; Jeff Richter, Coquitlam, BC; David Kidney, Dundas,

ON; Shelley White, Bolton-Est, QC; and Michael Carter, Victoria.

banjo tones and sounds and styles, which I fell in love with. The variety, and the wealth, and the depth of the history of all the different types of instruments that were played pre-bluegrass, I've been kind of lost in that aspect of it ever since."

The Compost Mountain Boys and the Striped Pig String Band were Jason's first forays into performing live before taking a fateful fly fishing trip with his dad to Fernie, BC, in 2007. His buddy, the noted banjo player Ivan Rosenberg, had mentioned a gal in Victoria, BC, whom he thought Jason should meet. Curious, he made the detour to Victoria and met Pharis at an old-time jam. They started courting. As an act of faith, she sent him a copy of *Tupelo Blues* by Hoyt Ming and His Peppersteppers. As one would.

"We connected very early on," says Pharis. "He was still in California and I was in B.C., and we were driving back and forth to see each other. During one of our times apart, I sent him an e-mail with *Tupelo Blues* saying, 'Oh my god, this just makes me crazy, I hope you love it as much as I do'. And for him that was one of those sure signs that I was the one. He knew and loved the record already, and for me that was a very good sign."

They were married within two and a half months of meeting each other.

Pharis Patenaude grew up in Horsefly, as did four generations of her family before her. Her dad led The Patenaude Family Band, which performed country covers and his originals at festivals around B.C. They were even booked for Expo '86 in Vancouver.

"Some of it was ridiculously adorable," says Pharis. "You have three little blonde girls onstage singing songs called *Mama You're Somethin'*, you know, things that my dad would write for my mom. We'd all be in matching outfits."

Pharis left Horsefly to study biology and environmental studies at the University of Victoria. She took songwriting for extra credits and assimilated into the local old-time scene. In 2004, she formed Outlaw Social with Catherine Black (banjo, bass) and Oliver Swain (banjo, bass)—a founder member of The Bills and Scrüj MacDuhk. They would add Kendel Carson (fiddle) and Adam Dobres (electric guitar) and make two acclaimed recordings—*A Seven Song EP* and the album *Dry Bones* (2007)—before running out of steam. A transcript of Pharis's song *Methadone* from that period appeared in *Penguin Eggs* No. 35.

Two years later, she and Jason formed The Haints with fiddler Erynn Marshall and released *Shout Monah*. In 2010, it was nom-

inated for two Canadian Folk Music Awards: Traditional Album of the Year and Ensemble of the Year. Marshall, though, had her heart set on moving to Virginia. As Bruce Springsteen would say, 'That's all she wrote'.

That same year, though, under the banner of Jason and Pharis Romero and Friends, they recorded the all-instrumental *Back Up And Push*. Those friends included 19 different fiddlers—one for each track. Neither Jason nor Pharis, though, consider it a fair indication of their partnership.

"*Back Up and Push* I would say was just a fun thing for Jason and I to go and do but it's certainly not as encompassing as our three duet albums."

The first of these, *A Passing Glimpse*, features five Romero originals, a couple from such legendary characters as Uncle Dave Macon and The Carter Family, and the remainder came out of the public domain.

"We'd grown and changed so much as musicians," says Pharis. "I listen to that record and I think that there's a real honesty about it. It's a great collection of songs really carefully chosen. Some of those songs, like *Lay Down in Sorrow*, I had been sitting on for years. And some of the songs that Jason sang, he'd been playing forever. Then you do the next record, and everything has a much smaller scope of time. So, I look at *A Passing Glimpse* very fondly."

And then came *Lone Gone Out West Blues*—a break-through album by any logical conclusion. The Juno committee, of course, completely ignored it but it did receive a nomination from the Canadian Folk Music Awards as Traditional Album of The Year. It lost out to Mary Jane Lamond and Wendy MacIsaac's superb *Seinn*—another album the Junos failed

to consider.

"I hesitate to think about anything like that, because it's hard for me to have any perspective on those things," says Pharis. "They're our songs no matter what. I love them. But if you look at critical acclaim, or awards, or anything like that, I would say that *Lone Gone Out West Blues* definitely introduced us to a much larger community than our previous record. We were definitely happy with how well it did."

Which pretty much brings us back to *A Wanderer I'll Stay*. And talking about wandering... During their recent tour of the U.K., they shot a video with Tim O'Brien at the prestigious Celtic Connections hooley in Glasgow, Scotland, where they performed with the likes of Cahalen Morrison and Eli West. And they tour Western Canada until the middle of April. No wonder the Romero family banjo company has a four-year waiting list. And it really is a joint venture. Jason makes the bodies of these beautiful instruments and Pharis decorates the fretboard and heads with delicate mother of pearl and copper and brass inlay.

"We are building banjos now for 2019," says Jason. "We started limiting our orders to 25 a year in hopes of getting a grip on the orders. Normally, pre-baby, when we weren't touring, we could do 40-60 a year. And after the babe, with touring, it's dropped to 20 or 30."

"Obviously, we know we're in a very special, privileged position as musicians, to be able to pick and choose, to go on adventures and play music because we love it, not because we need to pay our mortgage. With that though, we also do feel the pressure, or I do, to refocus on the banjo company because I want to get banjos into the hands of all my wonderfully patient customers."



The Penguin Eggs Interview



Tom Paxton

Dolly Parton, Simon and Garfunkel, Monty Python's Flying Circus, Bob Dylan, Neil Diamond, Flatt & Scruggs, Willie Nelson, John Denver... all are among the numerous artists to record Tom Paxton's songs.

The quintessential American folksinger, he rose out of the '60s Greenwich Village coffee house scene—portrayed in the Coen Brothers' film *Inside Llewyn Davis*, in which the character Troy Nelson plays Paxton—to international acclaim through such renowned songs as *Ramblin' Boy*, *Bottle of Wine*, *Going To The Zoo*, *Wasn't That A Party*, and *The Last Thing on My Mind*. Indeed, he moved to the U.K. for a prolonged period in the early '70s due to his success in Europe. While his discography now exceeds 60-odd albums, his latest, *Redemption Road*, clearly ranks amongst his finest. As always, Midge, his wife of 50 years, inspired the muse. She died after a long illness last November. Tom Paxton received a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2009.

Questions by Roddy Campbell

It's been almost seven years since your last album of original material. What got you recording again?

Well, I kept writing but not very prolifically, as is probably obvious. I didn't feel the recording urge until about a year ago when I realized I had about half an album of very good songs, and if I wanted to do an album, I better get off my butt. So I worked fairly diligently over the last year to get it up to scratch, and then I called [producer] Jim Rooney in Nashville, and it worked out.

You pay tribute to an old friend, Dave Van Ronk, on *The Mayor of MacDougall Street*.

Yes, he was my best man when I got married.

How important was he to you as a mentor?

What he did do for me was, right after I got out of the army, Dave gave me an impromptu guitar lesson. He wanted to show me three-finger picking, which is the basis of fingerpicking, period. So in an agonizing, must have been awful for him, must have been two straight hours to get me to do the alternating thumb and the fingers in between the thumb strokes. It certainly was the basis of everything I've done since. He had a huge effect on me. Would I have eventually learned it elsewhere? Probably, but the fact was I learned it from Dave. He was a terrific teacher. He had a lot of students over the years, Christine Lavin among them.

What's your fondest memory of him?

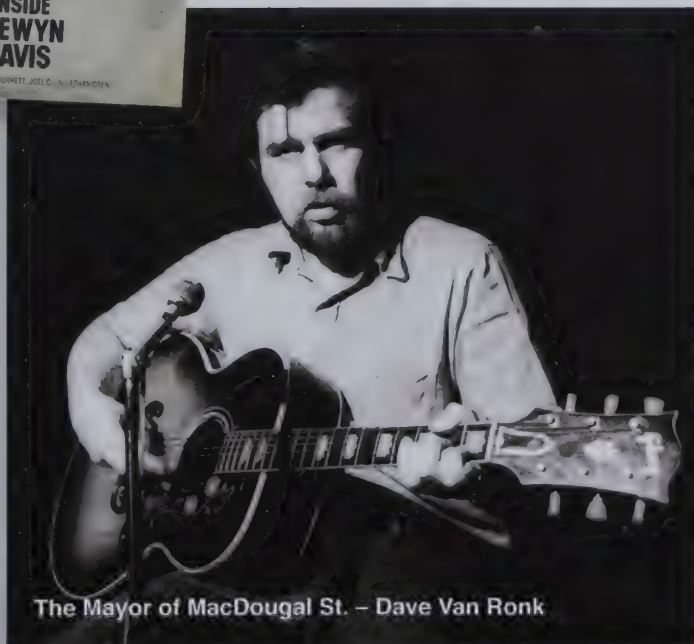
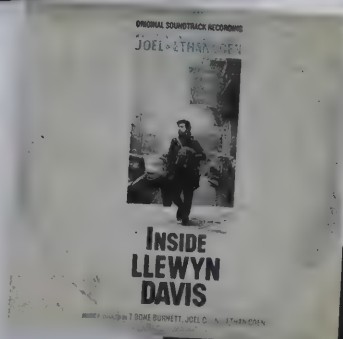
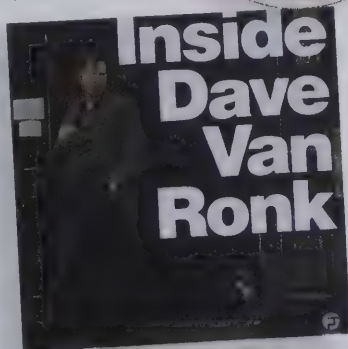
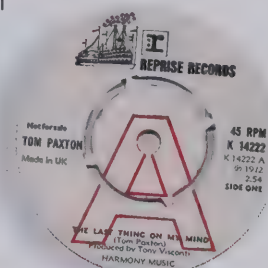
His asthmatic wheeze of a laugh. He was a generous spirit...I don't know if you knew Dave at all. He had a wonderful way of taking the mickey, without any barb in it. There was no malice in the man at all. Unless he was provoked. I do remember, he put down some ultra-purist. Someone mentioned this guy, who shall remain nameless, and Dave kinda snorted and said, "Oh, him. He's so pure he's got surface noise in his voice".

What did you make of *Inside Llewyn Davis*?

I loved the movie. I thought it was a great movie. Because I didn't make the mistake of thinking it was Dave Van Ronk. It was never intended to be perceived as Dave, and the movie was based on his book, which was about Greenwich Village in the '60s. He was not Llewyn Davis, who was a marvellous character, who was a genius at snatching defeat from the jaws of victory, which was not Dave. Dave was not self-destructive. Dave had a particular kind of talent that didn't translate to the mass market at all, so he was never a threat to be a star, unless by some accident...but he was a brilliant artist, and he enjoyed his art. He would, you know, bitch and kvetch and he could do his grumpy thing as well as any man living, but he loved his life. Now this is not Llewyn Davis.

What did you think of the movie version of *The Last Thing on My Mind*?

I loved it. I thought they did a very, very nice job. I think they did a very straight-ahead version. It was a very, very sad movie about a very sad, confused guy; it was done brilliantly, and John Goodman was beyond belief. He was so good, such a nasty asshole.



- SINCE

1961-



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Was it an accurate portrayal of the Village at the time?

Oh yeah, I mean you didn't dislike the guy you just sort of wanted to say to him tap the bricks. One of the things I loved about that movie, I thought about it later, was that Llewyn Davis was the kind of character who would hitchhike all the way to Chicago to audition for Al Grossman, by singing the least commercial song in his entire repertoire, which was almost guaranteed to turn the guy off. I mean, as the guy said, 'I don't hear money here.' Well, no shit. An Elizabethan ballad that just did not translate to urban America in 1961, but that's a nice fine point of that movie that I appreciated...that this guy was truly a self-subverter.

Do you have a favourite version of *Last Thing On My Mind*?

Well, I have several that I really like a lot. Let me see...Joan Baez did it very beautifully, so did Peter, Paul and Mary. Neil Diamond did a very dramatic version but that's the only way he can roll. I don't recall ever hearing a version of it that I hated.

You've said in the past it's your favourite song. What makes it so special for you?

As far as it being my favourite song, I think I have songs that I regard more highly, but I'm certainly grateful to that one. When I teach songwriting, I can show in that song that verses are different from choruses. The verse is a story, or information, and the chorus is like a soliloquy in a play. Which is, that everything stops and the chorus is emotion. The verse takes care of the facts of the matter, and the chorus is the emotional reaction to it. And it being emotional, the melody goes up, and that's what that does...so it kind of encapsulates a lot of the things I believe makes a good song.

However, having said that, I would say that there's a couple of songs on this album that are among my favourites that I've ever done. *Central Square* would be one of them. *Redemption Road* is another...that's a co-write, of course. But I really love *Central Square* a lot.

Come On Holy is such a beautiful song. Is that a tribute to Midge?

It's a tribute to Midge, and it's a tribute to everyone that I've met along the road who's tried to live a spiritual life, even a religious life...tried to live up to a standard of living, who believe that the way we conduct ourselves directly contributes to the world. Yeah, it's to them, but everything like that is to Midge. I miss her very, very, very badly. I spent a dreadful day yesterday, just wasn't able to shake it.

Once most folksingers had topical songs like *If The Poor Don't Matter* in their repertoire. Not so much anymore, why?

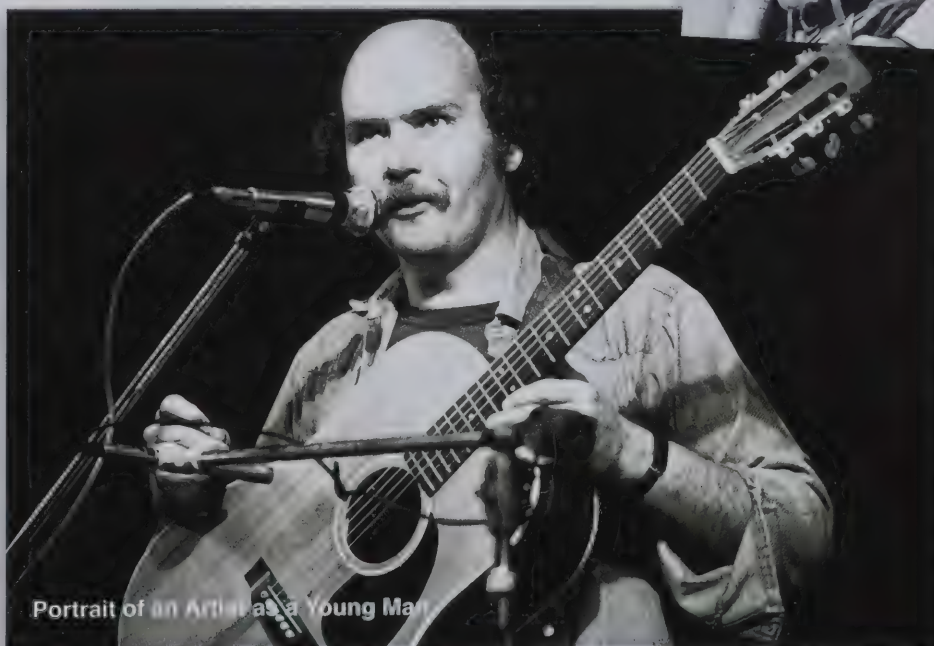
Well, there's no money in it. It's not going to take you any place lucrative. Van Ronk would tell you that the prospect of being drafted and sent to Vietnam to die concentrates the mind wonderfully. To paraphrase Samuel Johnson, we had a decade with two national emergen-

cies...the Civil Rights Movement and the war. The war brought with it the draft. I mean, I knew guys who got drafted and died, I mean, everyone knew that getting drafted meant the jungle...and no wonder people were angry about that. What the fuck were people going to Vietnam and dying for? A corrupt family-owned business, which was Vietnam. Corruption was beyond description. We didn't need it. It turned Communist, as the worst fear mongers were saying, and has been irrelevant ever since. Right? An obscure corner of Southeast Asia was not worth 55,000 American boys getting killed, not to mention Vietnamese. And so that was what dominated life in the '60s.

It's difficult to imagine a young person now beginning their career singing *If The Poor Don't Matter*. I saw a sickening item in the paper not too long ago that said, in effect, that most of the wealthy Americans think that the poor have it pretty good. What do you say, what do you do but laugh? When you're up against that...you wonder, well, no wonder kids aren't taking that on, because it's almost overwhelming, that kind of indifference.

How did you come to write *Buffalo Dreams*?

Usually I write line after line of bullshit looking for something to make sense, and on that occasion, it was at the top of the page...I just wrote...'*just one more child of the prairie*' because the Prairie always fascinates me. I mean, it's the same in Canada, that endless rolling hills. It goes all the way down to Oklahoma and Texas, you know, and it goes from the Mississippi to the Rockies. And on the old, old maps, it was called the great American desert. And just the epic of crossing that thing. I mean, how did they survive crossing the damn thing? But I read, not too long ago, a fabulous poem by Emily Dickinson called *To Make A Prairie*. And it goes, in its entirety, '*To make a prairie, you need some clover and a bee, some clover and one bee, and reverie. The reverie alone*





will do, when bees are few'. How's that? I just love that. So I don't know, that poem, that lyric, it just flowed out and I let it come, and when I got to the chorus, I thought about those women... 'women stand in doorways looking southward', which is kind of cryptic, but I saw kind of a Georgia O'Keeffe painting, not really Georgia O'Keeffe, but in tans and ambers and rust colours, a sort of New Mexico adobe kind of house, and a woman in the doorway, looking at we don't know what. It just kind of haunted me, that image. But I'd already written the lyric when I began to see that image in my mind but it fit so well...so it's hard to explain the impulse of a song like that.

It's a song I could never have written 40 years ago... and I don't know why but I know that for a fact. That song was not in me 40 years ago.

Who inspired *Time To Spare*?

We all did. I mean, I remember when everybody was picking up electric guitars. I never was tempted. I didn't want to try and become a rock star. I wanted to do what I was doing, I wanted to follow the same path that Pete [Seeger] had followed, you know; I was not a slavish follower of Pete but, you know, he was my example. So everyone was becoming Byrds or whatever...and I don't question their motive for one minute. It was music that intrigued them, and suddenly, because of The Beatles, principally, it became possible to envision making great music electrically. So a lot of people picked that up. For me, it would have been false. I've often thought that there can't be anything sadder than being willing to sell out, and having no buyers. What do you do then?

***The Parting Glass* is the last song on the album. I've heard you're retiring; is this really your departing post?**

I'm going to quit touring; I'm not retiring. I wouldn't know...you know, park the guitar in the closet? I don't think so. I love music too much for that, but the airports have won. I can't stand them, and I just can't stand the travel. In November, I'm playing a home date here at the Birchmere and it's 15 minutes from home. I'm going to finish it, drive

home, and quit touring. What form things will take after that I'm not sure. I have some people I enjoy writing with who are in Nashville...I expect to spend more time down there.

How did Janis Ian and John Prine get involved with *Redemption Road*?

Well, Janice and I we're good friends, and she lives in Nashville. It's a 10-minute ride for her to get to the studio and sing a harmony with me. And John lives there as well; I've known him for 30 years when he started out in Chicago with Steve Goodman. They came as a package, they were friends and colleagues.

Do you ever think, what would have happened to your career if you had joined the Chad Mitchell Trio?

Ha ha, well I did join for one week, but I didn't make the cut, my voice didn't blend well with theirs, so they let me go and they got Joe Fraser. But if I had stayed with them, I wonder what would have happened. They certainly had a political attitude. They were popular...they were on all the big television shows and all that, but they certainly had a conscience. So I'm sure I would have continued to write songs; as it was, they did a lot of my songs. So I don't know how things would have been different. Maybe I wouldn't have been broke all of the time...but I'm glad things worked the way they did.

Looking back on the early days in the Village, did you realize you were in the heart of a cultural revolution?

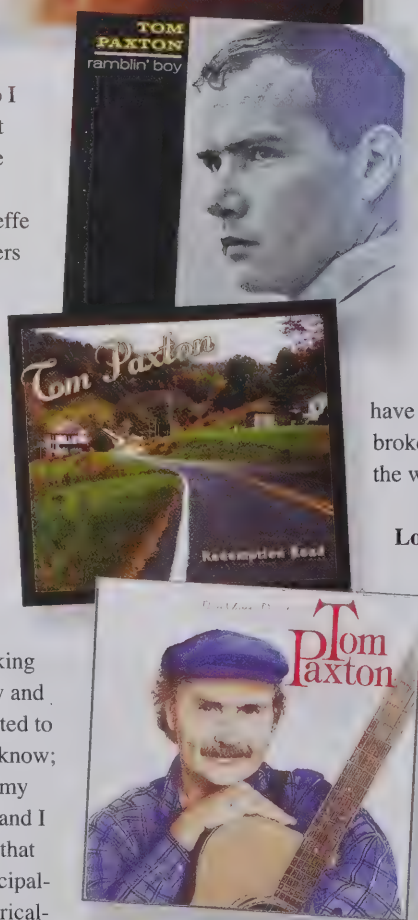
No...none of us knew that. We knew that the joint was jumpin', knew that there were gigs for folksingers...who knew how long that was going to last? We knew that people were getting recording contracts, and so we knew that there was something going on, but we had no clue that there would be a meaning attached to it beyond what we were aware of at the time.

Did you know Ian and Sylvia?

Oh yeah, I was friends with them. They were fabulous. I happened to be in the Gaslight the night that Al Grossman brought them in to sing a guest set and, of course, they blew the place down.

How did you come to write *Ramblin' Boy*?

I can actually answer that. This was in '63, and both Dylan and Dave Van Ronk had in their repertoire a song called *He Was a Friend of Mine*...I thought it was a wonderful song. One night at the Gaslight



between sets, I wrote three songs in a little pocket notebook. The first and third songs were both instantly forgettable, and the middle one was called *My Ramblin' Boy*. I wrote it in about 20 minutes. I wrote it in direct response, really kind of in admiration of, *He Was a Friend of Mine*. I wasn't stealing the song—it's my tune, my words—but it was inspired by that song. I wanted to write another such a song, and that's how *Ramblin' Boy* came out.

You moved to London in the '70s. How was the British folk scene then?

Well, I was like a kid in a candy store. The main thing about it was, as you know, a folk club met, like, one night a week, usually upstairs in a pub. And it didn't matter what night of the week it was, it was jammed. Now, the Gaslight was a club in New York that was open seven nights a week, and shall we say that on a Monday or Tuesday in January, there would be tumbleweed blowing through the place. There I'd be in Cambridge on a Monday night and the room would be bursting at the seams. It was like Saturday night every night. And they were very receptive to what I was doing. I found a scene that I instantly loved and was successful in, and never looked back.

The British scene was more traditional, wasn't it?

It was very traditional, and I mean at that time I was singing quite a few traditional songs. I was singing Woody Guthrie songs, Pete Seeger songs, Burl Ives songs...and then songs that I was writing myself, so I was kind of a mixture of all of that.

What sort of characters did you meet over there?

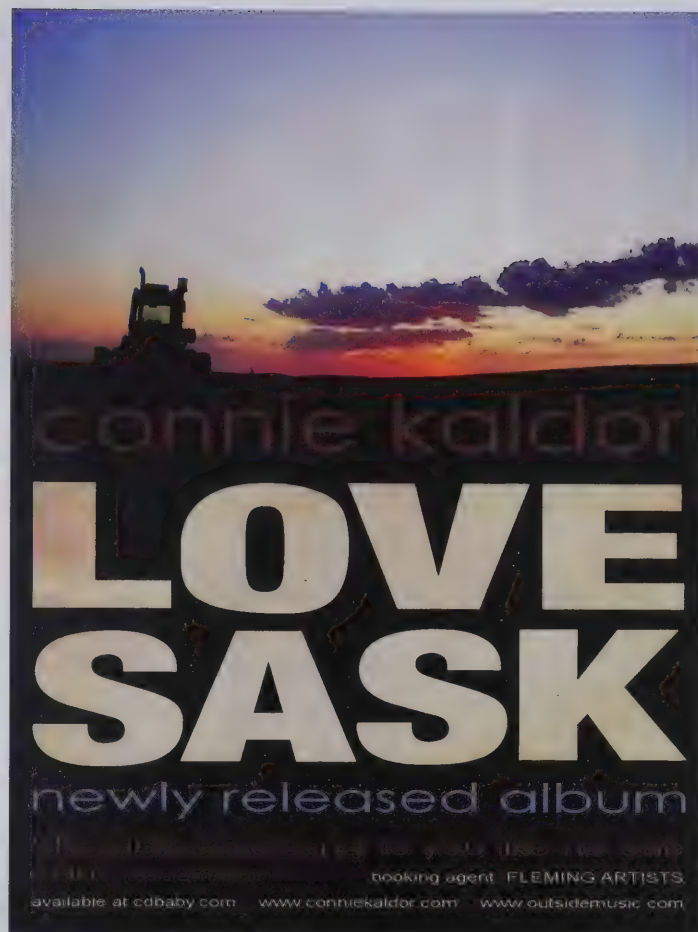
Alex Campbell. Ha ha. Big Alex, he was a pistol. And Derroll Adams...and Archie Fisher, Matt McGuinn...oh yeah, I was meeting all those guys. Bob Davenport, Louis Killen, Paddy Bell...Julie Felix, yeah. It was fabulous, I made a lot of friends.

What did your Grammy Lifetime Achievement award in 2009 mean to you?

Well, as they say in the Southwest, it knocked my hat in the crick. I had no idea that anything like that was in the offing. I had been nominated for four Grammys, winning none of them, which is kind of par for the course, you know. People get nominated many times before they win those things sometimes...and then out of the blue I got a call from the president of the whole shebang, saying they wanted to give me a Lifetime Achievement award. I mean, it brought tears to my eyes. I was stunned by it. I told them I was gobsmacked...it meant a great deal to me. Next month, March 14, I'm going back home to Oklahoma and I'm being inducted into the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame, and I guess, you know, if you live long enough, and you refuse to go away, they start to give you stuff. I was back in Oklahoma in December visiting a cousin and we went over to Tulsa to the Woody Guthrie museum...oh, it's great to see.

How would you like to be remembered?

I would like to be remembered as someone who cared, and showed it in song. Somebody who put a couple of songs in the song bag. That'll do for me.



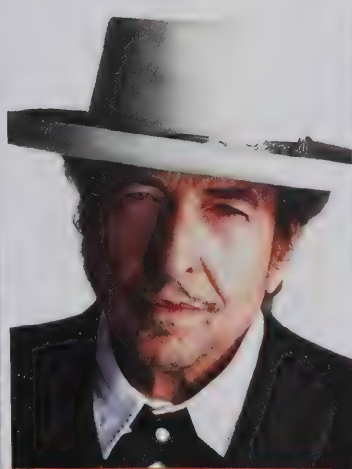
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Lead Belly

Lead Belly

The Smithsonian Folkways Collection
(Smithsonian Folkways)



Huddie Ledbetter – known to the world as Lead Belly – stands among the giants of

20th century American music. Place him alongside the likes of Louis Armstrong, Hank Williams, Bill Monroe, Robert Johnson and Woody Guthrie as an inspiration for a diverse array of musicians and songwriters. Cue The Beach Boys, Led Zeppelin, Nirvana, Red Hot Chili Peppers and Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds for starters. Of course, that doesn't include the countless folk and blues performers that fell under his spell.

When The Weavers took a sanitized version of Lead Belly's

Goodnight Irene to the top of the U.S. singles chart in 1950, it stayed there for 13 weeks and sowed the seeds for the urban folk revival at the end of the decade.

In the U.K., Lonnie Donegan sparked the skiffle craze with a hit cover of Lead Belly's *Rock Island Line*. While skiffle peaked in 1957, it had a profound influence on the British blues and folk boom that emerged in the early '60s.

Lead Belly always said he was born Jan. 15, 1888, most likely on the Jeter Plantation, a few miles south of Mooringsport, LA. His parents were sharecroppers who eventually bought a small neighbouring parcel of land which they cleared to grow cotton. It was back-breaking work and Huddie grew up toiling in the fields but somewhat privileged as an only son. He had a good education for

the times and discovered he had a knack for remembering the words and tunes to the numerous traditional songs he found amongst the African-American share-cropping community. They included *Ha-Ha This Away*, *Poor Howard*, *John Henry* and *Take A Whiff On Me* – one of the first songs about cocaine.

At age seven, his father bought him a button accordion (known locally as a windjammer) and overnight he knocked together a rudimentary *There's No Cornbread Here*. As he grew more proficient as a musician, he took up the guitar in his teens and began performing regularly at *sookie jumps* – rural dances and parties.

Meanwhile, oil was discovered locally and Shreveport, 19 miles away, grew into a frontier boom town. And Fannin Street ran the length of its notorious neighborhood, with its numerous dance halls, bars and brothels – \$3 a trick, two for \$5. It attracted young Huddie like a moth to a flame. There he heard the jazz and barrelhouse blues piano players from New Orleans that had a huge influence on his playing. And there he blossomed into one of the Street's most popular entertainers before developing what is speculated as a serious dose of the clap.

Once healthy, Huddie wound up in Dallas, TX, performing on Elm Street or Deep Elum – the equivalent of Fannin Street in Shreveport. And in Dallas, he bought his first 12-string Stella guitar. While he played mandolin, accordion, bass, piano and guitar, the 12-string soon became his instrument of choice.

Possibly around 1912, he met Blind Lemon Jefferson. Now best known for songs such as *Jack O' Diamonds* and *See That My Grave Is Kept Clean*, Jefferson helped pioneer bottle-neck blues guitar and its open tunings. These techniques he passed on to Huddie while they performed together of and on for several years.

Despite his immense musical abilities, Huddie grew up with a quick temper in a violent soci-

ety. He had several brushes with the law. Indeed, he was on the lam, going by the alias William Boyd, when he was charged with murdering his cousin's husband, Will Stafford. While the details are sketchy at best, Huddie was found guilty and sentenced to between seven and thirty years in Sugarland State Prison. There he discovered numerous work songs: *Go Down Old Hannah*, *Grey Goose*, *Yellow Gal*, *Black Betty*, *Pick A Bale of Cotton* ... And it was at Sugarland that he got his nickname Lead Belly. Despite the popular myth that he sang his way out of jail, he actually served his minimum seven-year sentence.

While he remained free for five years, in 1930 he again wound up back behind bars at the notorious Angola State Penitentiary, for stabbing a man in the arm with a knife. This time the sentence was six to ten years. Again, myths be damned. Lead Belly applied for parole in 1933. The board agreed that he would be set free on June 22, 1934. But before that date rolled around John Avery Lomax and his son Alan would arrive at Angola collecting field recordings for the Library of Congress. Lead Belly would become their greatest discovery. Once freed, he ended up moving to New York City, where he was managed for a time by the Lomaxes. Through their contacts, and shameless exploitation of his convict past, Lead Belly would become the first blues musician to achieve fame among white audiences. 'The King of the 12-String Guitar' would also become the first bluesman to be treated as a major media figure in the mainstream press.

Lead Belly recorded extensively between 1933 and his death Dec. 6, 1949, most notably for Alan Lomax and The Library of Congress and for Moses Asch's Asch Records and his Folkways Records. And it's these recordings that make up the heart of this exquisite five-disc boxset. Elegantly packaged, it features several essays including Woody Guthrie's "*Lead Belly Is A Hard Name*" and an excellent

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brief history by the Smithsonian's Jeff Place. There are numerous rare photos, posters, album covers, letters and pieces of historical interest including his original 1925 pardon from the Governor of Texas. Each of the 108 tracks come with extensive notes. These include 15 previously unreleased recordings. Among them the dubious *Ain't It A Shame To Go Fishin' On A Sunday*, which includes the verse: "Ain't it a shame to beat your wife on a Sunday ... when you've got Monday, Tuesday ..."

Billed as a career-retrospective *Lead Belly* certainly covers a fair gamut of the man's music including a surprising reworking of the popular sea shanty *Haul Away Joe*. More intriguing, though, is his accordion playing on *Sukey Jump*. It clearly bears the first stirrings of Zydeco. Woody Guthrie makes an appearance on the hilarious talking blues, *We Shall Be Free*, on which Bob Dylan modeled *I Shall Be Free*. And the more topical songs include *Bourgeois Blues*, *Scottsboro Boys* and *The Titanic*, which tells of world heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson being refused passage on its maiden voyage because of his race.

Of course, *Lead Belly* pays homage to such compelling landmark songs as *Irene*, *Midnight Special*, *Black Girl*, *Rock Island Line*, *Bring Me A Little Water Silvy*, *Cotton Fields*, *Take This Hammer*, *Alberta*, *Pick A Bale of Cotton*, *John Henry*, *Duncan and Brady* ... Fabulous songs, all, brimming with vitality and flair flowing from that world famous 12-string guitar. Just listen to the energy that goes into *Gallis Poll*, later brilliantly covered as *Gallows Pole* by such a discerning taste as Robert Plant.

While the majority of these songs appear in numerous compilations, including six volumes released by Rounder Records between 1991 and 1995, this absolute treasure of a package still contains enough extraordinary musical mementos to satisfy even the most cognitive disciple.

— By Roddy Campbell

Father John Misty

I Love You, Honeybear (Sub Pop)



Fear Fun, Josh Tillman's first album as Father John Misty (fol-

lowing incarnations as sensitive singer/songwriter J. Tillman and drummer for Fleet Foxes), memorably annealed trenchant, almost surreal lyrical self-awareness to full-fledged, psych-tinged retro-pop, its soaring melodies aswim in '70s-grade reverb and woozy strings. It was easily one of the best albums of 2012, which sets the bar high for a sophomore effort. What's more, Tillman is in love—recently wedded, in fact—though this has barely tempered his acerbic wit. "*People are boring / but you're something else / I can't explain / please take my last name*," he croons on *Chateau Lobby #4*, a Mistian marriage proposal if ever there was one. On *Bored in the USA*, his bleak evocation of the death of meaning in western culture is greeted by canned laughter; he nitpicks a lover of whom he's grown tired on *The Night Josh Tillman Came to Our Apartment*, confesses to doing awful things on *The Ideal Husband* and saves his sweetest sentiments for a song called *When You're Smiling and Astride Me*.

All this snark, despair, and back-handed tenderness is

cloaked in gorgeously layered arrangements and Tillman's flawless croon. In other words, it's completely compelling, hilariously wrenching and, at this early stage, a solid contender for the top 10 lists of 2015.

— By Scott Lingley

Dave Ray

Legacy (Red House Records)



Having been a music enthusiast my entire life and having made my living

for the last 25 years in the folk, roots, and blues worlds, I was very surprised to see a three-CD collection of "rare and unreleased songs" by Mr. Dave Ray. Surprised because I had never heard of him. Until I started reading the extensive labour of love that is the 32-page booklet, chock full of rare photos, comprehensive liner notes (compiled by his longtime bandmate Tony Glover), I hadn't put two and two together. Dave was the Ray in Koerner, Ray and Glover, a seminal '60s folk and blues trio from the same Minnesota folk scene that spawned Bob Dylan.

Ends up Glover was the architect of this passion project and his enthusiasm really comes through in what must have been an extensive hunt for the 55 unreleased early concert recordings, radio broadcasts, tracks from out of print



and difficult to find albums, and even a soulful radio commercial for a Mervyn's California Super Sale. Taken from sources like old analogue reel-to-reel and cassette tapes, the quality is not always pristine but the raw power and historical nature of these recordings make them a MUST HEAR for any serious music fan!

One of the personal thrills I had in discovering Dave's solo work through this collection was discovering the fun contradiction of an artist who has obvious guitar skills that shine through in these recordings but often are set in a very casual, almost sloppy (in a good way), setting. It's down-home, front-porch, late-night kitchen blues at its finest.

With plenty of original material to covers of many of his heroes and influences, including Lead Belly, the Carter Family, Leroy Carr, Muddy Waters, Sleepy John Estes, Skip James, Robert Johnson, Yank Rachell, Memphis Minnie, Tommy McLennan, Percy Sledge, Slim Harpo, and even Bill Monroe and Rufus Thomas, this is a document of substance.

From *Alabama Women* and *Go Down Old Hannah*, early recordings made in his parents' basement in his late teens, to songs from his final concert with Geoff Muldaur such as (the ironically titled) cover of Arthur (Big Boy) Crudup's *So Glad I'm Living* and his own *Almost As If*, this collection of 55 tunes is almost cinematic in its breadth.

Dave lost his battle with lung cancer on Nov. 2, 2002. This collection ensures his legacy. Psst... there might be more!

— By Michael Wrycraft



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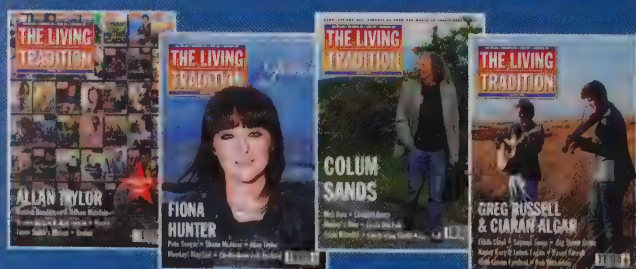
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David Wiffen

Songs from the Lost and Found (True North



Records)

Is there a more enigmatic figure in the history of

Canadian music than David Wiffen? As a teenager, he arrived in Canada from Britain and became a seminal figure in the music scene of the '60s and early '70s. Full of promise, he started a career playing with everybody from Bruce Cockburn to Colleen Petersen. Hit singles came as a solo...and then his disappearance from performing because of a physical injury.

In the meantime, his too-few songs have lived a healthy life covered by classy acts such as Eric Andersen, Tom Rush, Cowboy Junkies, Anne Murray, The Jayhawks, Harry Belafonte, Roger McGuinn, Ray Wiley Hubbard, Ian & Sylvia, Blackie and the Rodeo Kings, Jerry Jeff Walker to name some. Great songwriter's cred.

True North has compiled 12 unreleased songs and five alternative versions of songs previously released on his last album release, *South of Somewhere*, in 1999, including a lovely cover of Lynn Miles's *Crazy Me*. This collection not only showcases his songwriting but his lovely voice, vaguely reminiscent of Gordon Lightfoot in his prime, especially on the wonderful *Ballad of Jacob Marlowe*. It's a terrific collection of songs, adding to a body of work that begged for more—for too long.

— By les siemieniuk

Jim Boyes

Sensations of a Wound: The Long, Long Trail of Robert Riby Boyes (No Masters)



Jim Boyes's grandfather, Robert Riby (Croppie) Boyes, fought in the First World War, was wounded and taken as a prisoner of war, but rarely spoke of his experiences, and he didn't write a diary. His grandson, Jim, became fascinated

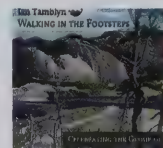
with Croppie's story, went looking for it, found it, and brought it back in this album. Sung in a raw English (U.K.) folk style, the songs are accompanied by Belinda O'Hooley on piano and accordion. As such, it is unique in being a kind of a musical biography, necessitating perhaps a new genre label: genealogy folk. *Down Upon the Dugout Floor*, the opening song, presents the reality of being in the lines: "For I'm here in no-man's land / and the world has turned to sand / down upon the dugout floor".

This is followed by *Where You Belong—Scarborough*, a variant of *Scarborough Fair*. From there one song leads to another along the path of Croppie's war journey and return. If ever you needed a reminder of the grimness of trench warfare, this album is a powerful statement of a human spirit caught in bad place.

— By Gene Wilburn

Ian Tamblyn

Walking in the Footsteps: Celebrating the Group of Seven (Independent)



In Ian's website, under discography, there are pictures of 29 album covers, not including this latest one. So I guess that means this is number 30. So if you are not familiar with Ian's work, you should be. He's good...he's very, very, very good.

From a Juno award in 1976 for his first album to a "best political song" award from Folk Music Ontario in 2013, he has been celebrated for producing a body of work unmatched in this country, and it's mostly about this country. He's done thematic works before—the *Four Coast* project, *Antarctica*, a Celtic project, as well as just collections of damn good songs. All sublime and beautifully delivered.

This time Mr. Tamblyn turns his attention to the Group of Seven. 15 songs steeped in the rocky soul of Northern Ontario. Lush and

lyrical, it's fitting that a group of songs about painters and painting would paint such a beautiful musical picture itself.

So no beating around the bush—it's damn good. Put it on and let it wash over you.

It's a stunning set piece and as the Seven were those most quintessential of Canadian visual artists, Ian is the most quintessential of Canadian musicians.

Once again, *Walking in the Footsteps* is a beautiful piece of work. You have to experience it. You'll be missing something wonderful if you don't.

— By les siemieniuk

Samantha Martin & Delta Sugar

Send The Nightingale (Independent)



Samantha Martin applies three secret weapons to her latest release:

one, her mind-boggling vocal power; two, the bounteous backup vocals of Sherie Marshall and Stacie Tabb, and, three, the combination of Jimmy Hill's soul-freeing strains on B3 organ to Mikey McCallum's country-edged Gretsch guitar. Following on the roots-rock approach of The Haggard, Martin proves herself the jaw-dropping, near-feral love child of Bonnie Bramlett and Melissa Etheridge. With a sound that's equal parts soul revival to full-fledged gospel meet, her larynx-ripping leads, leavened by Marshall and Tabb's support, prove the breakfast, lunch, and dinner on this filling release—the absence of a typical rhythm section only adding to its clear vocal focus. From hugely grievous, heart-busting ballads to full-on testifying at hurricane-force levels, Martin rules the stage, merging multiple genres like so much drink mix.

More Baptist preacher than Texas cowgirl on this outing, the chemistry between these three singers is headline news; one listen to the a cappella of *Tell The Heavens* will make a believer out of you. If there's a downside, it's



that many of these songs are not fully-fleshed-out compositions. They are fragments, snippets—arranged and performed within an inch of genius—yet they're largely light on melody and hooks you can bite into as a listener. Still, there's enough meat on these bones to satisfy.

Lovingly dedicated to her late mom, this nightingale's only obstacle is to keep from blowing the leaves out of the trees.

— By Eric Thom

Laura Marling

Short Movie (Ribbon Music)



In recent interviews, English singer/songwriter Laura Marling has

been quoted as being somewhat afraid that the creative well had run dry after writing and recording four albums in five years. The 25-year-old can rest assured that if her latest record, *Short Movie*, was something of a struggle to get out then maybe the struggle was worth it. No longer tied strictly to folk strains (if she ever really was) Marling is now confidently dipping her feet in rock, channelling a touch of Chrissie Hynde (*Gurdjieff's Daughter*) and Liz Phair (*Don't Let Me Bring You Down*), her voice both tough and vulnerable. She's still a master of the bal-

lad, though, with sombre cuts such as *Walk Alone* still dominating the proceedings. The centrepiece of the album might well be the desperate, dislocating *False Hope*, in which Marling appears to be setting down all of the loneliness and struggle of the last few years into one careening track. A wise and occasionally wise-ass album, and proof that she's still capable of pulling tricks out of her sleeves like they'll never end.

— By Tom Murray

Great Lake Swimmers

A Forest of Arms (Netwerk)



The sixth album by Ontario's Great Lake Swimmers doesn't so much

find the five-piece changing up their style as where they record. Not a flashy new studio but places like the Tyendinaga Caves in Ontario, a grain silo, and a castle; nothing particularly surprising given the band recorded the entirety of their 2009 album, *Lost Channels*, in various odd locations around the Thousand Islands. First single *Zero in the City* shows the Swimmers and front man Tony Dekker marking much of the same musical territory as before, Sufjan Stevens filtered through *Iron & Wine*, while *A Bird Flew Inside The House* ("To remind me

of a promise I made to myself") kicks off a round of animal and environmental themes that hits its most surrealistic lyrical moments (shades of Neil Young's *Will To Love*) with *The Great Bear*. It's a gorgeously orchestrated offering, Dekker's voice shrouded in echo, sparse piano notes, and mournful violin intersecting on the singer's musings, though also somewhat ponderous at points. Definitely a Sunday afternoon record, lulling, ruminative, and occasionally haunting.

— By Tom Murray

Billie Zizi

Gun Metal Dress (Independent)



There's a certain amount of misdirection in the blues-jazz title track of

Billie Zizi's debut album in that it doesn't quite prepare you for the wooziness to come. Sure, there's plenty of Gypsy violin (courtesy of Zizi's pops, Cam Neufeld) scattered throughout, snaking through *Windog Blues*, bringing an irresistible jauntiness to *Dancing Shoes*, but Zizi's heart is apparent when she slows everything down to mournful. Like the looping backwards guitar melting into the sparseness of intros on *You Do Me No Good*, with Zizi abandoning almost all lyrical drive by simply

repeating in an oddly matter-of-fact voice “drag me down” over and over again on the chorus, or the long, slow build in *Jukebox Baby*, leading to chaotic squalls of Zizi’s guitar. A fine first album, laying down groundwork for what will no doubt be one of the country’s most inventive voices for years to come.

– By Tom Murray

Fortunate Ones

The Bliss (Old Farm Pony Records)



Born on opposite ends of Newfoundland, this folk/pop duo came

together in St. John’s when they discovered how well their voices blended together. Fortunate Ones are Catherine Allan (accordion, keys, mandolin, percussion, guitar) and Andrew James O’Brien (guitar, bass, percussion). He has a previous disc, *Songs for Searchers* (2011) and she’s toured with Amelia Curran and Don Brown-

rigg. The duo has a light, breathy, and airy sound that on a song such as Tom Waits’s *Picture In a Frame* is as different as you can get from Waits’s gravelly, deep rumble but works just as well for the song. There’s good string work on that track and *Without a Name* supplied by Kinley Dowling and John Spearns. The best and most distinctive of their own songs are *Solitary Sparks*, *Someday Love*, (these two and one other co-written with Murray Foster from Moxy Fruvous and Great Big Sea), *Oaks and Willows* and *The Bliss*. Nice folksy pop stuff well played.

– By Barry Hammond

Bob Dylan

Shadows in the Night (Columbia)



On paper, the concept of *Shadows in the Night* smacks of a particularly lazy sketch-comedy gag—wouldn’t it be hilarious if

Bob Dylan put out an album of crooner ballads? All thoughts of hilarity are dispelled right away when he wraps his rusty pipes around a haunting rendition of *I’m a Fool to Want You*, which evokes Billie Holiday’s shiver-inducing late-period spectral croak. The genius of Dylan-as-crooner is immediately apparent—he strips the old chestnuts here of sentiment and schmaltz, exposing the throb of raw emotion at their core. The greater irony here might be that a man who seems to take glee in rendering his own contributions to the canon unrecognizable in a live setting should grant the Great American Songbook such reverence. The radiant backing orchestration—two guitars, pedal steel, bass, and percussion—make a shimmering foil to Dylan’s minimally tuneful growl, giving an almost gospel lift to songs such as the stately *Stay with Me* and *That Lazy Old Sun*, which catches Dylan at his most avuncular. And, unlike most of the high concept al-

bums the folk marketplace seems to churn up, I can see myself returning to the present set when I’m taken by the appropriate blue mood.

– By Scott Lingley

Santiparro

True Prayer (Gnome Life Records)



Santiparro, a.k.a. Alan Scheurman, a singer/songwriter from

Detroit but now based in Brooklyn, has released his debut album, *True Prayer*, a psychedelic folk pilgrimage.

What is psychedelic folk, you say? Psych folk or freak folk are ordinary acoustic instrumentation with chanting, or peculiar, trance-like, and atmospheric sounds, often drawing on musical improvisation from non-western cultures.

In 2010, Scheurman, on a spiritual journey to Wirikuta, a site sacred to the Wixarica Huichol Indians located in the mountains

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of central Mexico, was given the name Santiparro by a Wixarica Huichol family. Santiparro means “the lens that sees many things not usually seen”.

True Prayer is a bright and lavish fusion of beautiful voices, creative lyrics, delightful guitars, silky percussive tones, and pleasing nature sounds. With help from guests Will Oldham (Bonnie ‘Prince’ Billy), Kyp Malone (TV On The Radio), Adam Wills (Bear In Heaven), Melati Malay (Young Magic), and Ben Bromley (New Villager), *True Prayer* is a wonderful musing, with sweet pearls such as *The New Baktun* and *Where We’re From*. *True Prayer* is a divine listen for the modern mystic.

– By Phil Harries

Erynn Marshall and Carl Jones

Sweet memories... never leave (Dittyville)



I was all set to pour derision all over *The Frogs Sang Symphonies*, a

glossy unit of contrived folk-pop product by photogenic Canadian duo Me & the Mrs., but I thought it would be more productive to say nice things about the new album from Canadian-American folk duo Erynn Marshall (fiddle) and Carl Jones (banjo), and you can just assume the exact opposite is true of Me & the Mrs. Marshall and Jones, who also happen to be married, have such an unaffected, joyful passion for their music, such a rich appreciation of folk tradition, such an unironic, in-no-way-smarmy approach that *Sweet memories... never leave* feels as fresh as a spring day, even though some of the tunes date from the 19th century. Their effortless interplay, vocally and instrumentally, is a sustained pleasure, whether on trad gems such as *Poor Little Ellen* and *Maple on the Hill* or jaunty instrumentals such as *Jack Rabbit Jump* and *The Loneman Waltz*. At no point during listening to it did I wonder whether I was



Baltic Crossing

listening to a sly parody of whimsical, over-earnest Canadian folk or something cannily calculated to shift units to sun-stroked folk fest patrons. So it has that going for it.

– By Scott Lingley

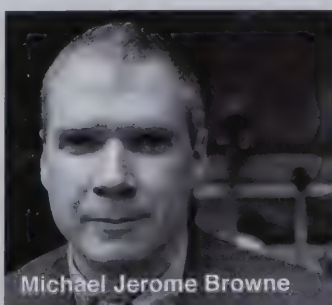
Michael Jerome Browne

Sliding Delta (Borealis)



Michael Jerome Browne has always been a time traveller of the highest

order. He revels in exploring, seeking out, and paying homage to a hundred years of blues. His award-winning albums are usually chock full of his own material with a healthy selection of covers, and it is often hard to tell his contemporary originals from these vintage blues. On his sixth Borealis Records release, *Sliding Delta*, Michael shows his joyful reverence for the giants of the genre from the '20s and '30s on whose shoulders all contemporary bluesmen stand, with an all-cover



Michael Jerome Browne

tribute, choosing not their most famous tunes but exposing some of their lesser-known songs and bringing them out into the light.

What sets this album apart from this string-playing wizard's previous releases is it is as spare as can be with just the man and his instrument, be it banjo, mandolin, or quite an assortment of vintage guitars and the occasional harmonica.

Blind Willie McTell, Memphis Minnie, Fred McDowell, Mississippi John Hurt, Blind Lemon Jefferson, and Skip James, to mention a few, are all honoured here. Amongst the generous selection of tunes, McTell's *Broke Down Engine* and Skip James's *Special Rider Blues* are stand outs. The record ends on a sweet spiritual note with *Choose Your Seat And Sit Down*, a duet with Eric Bibb, a touring mate of Michael's and a powerful performer on whose albums Michael is often a featured player.

The accompanying booklet is chock full of history and information about each track and for those passionate guitar devotees there is a Guitar Nerd's Corner with tuning and instrument information.

Borealis Records and MJB should be on high alert this coming award season as *Sliding Delta* is sure to be nominated for every blues, folk and roots award out there.

– By Michael Wrycraft

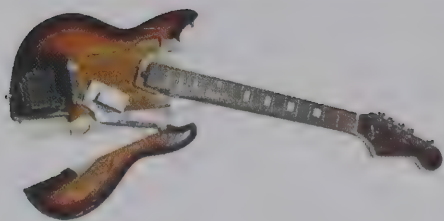
Baltic Crossing

The Tune Machine (Go' Danish Folk Music)

This disc is an absolute, unbridled joy. Five musicians—two Finns, two Danes, and one Brit—use the instruments and music of Scandinavia to, as far as I can tell, have about the best possible time you can ever think of having. A fair amount of traditional music, including jigs, polkas, fiddle tunes—there's even a schottische in here—is woven together with new material and new ideas and instrumentation, including bringing things like Northumberland pipes to the music of Italy, or hardanger fiddle to the music of England.

The band ranges across European music with an academic gaze—in the notes for *Menuet from Falster*, to give a typical example, they write that the piece “was written down in 1917 by a lady called Karen Suder and collected by local musician Rasmus Roxværd”—though the object, very clearly, is celebration not curation. There are at least as many exclamation points in the liner notes as there are umlauts, which is saying something (it looks like someone sneezed, what with all the dots).

In any event, these musicians' spirit and their ability is infectious, poignant, and invigorating. Sometimes, especially in the world of folk music, we forget about the big wide world out there, or that



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irony and sarcasm aren't the only serious emotions left to us. This disc is a breath of fresh air and a reminder that we aren't alone. Apparently we're surrounded by Scandinavians.

— By Glen Herbert

Bear's Den

Islands (Communion)



Last year at the Edmonton Folk Music Festival I stumbled across Bear's

Den. They are from the U.K. A trio of hipster, bearded young men, Andrew Davie, Kev Jones, and Joey Haynes. They played. They sang. They reminded me of the Edmonton band 100 mile house at times. They were very musical. They told lovely stories in their songs. I was captivated.

I ran to the record tent and, lo and behold, the times they are a changin'—they had no “product”. You could download from their website and at some gigs in England they pressed special-edition records only available at that gig. So I was more than pleasantly surprised when I opened my latest package from Mr. Editor Campbell to find an actual physical Bear's Den CD. It's called *Islands*, their first, and it's great.

With soft guitars, electric and acoustic, banjo, a touch of brass and cello, and with drums played like an actual instrument—the arrangements are sparse building to a rich fullness, melancholic

and dreamy with a touch of the bitters...and very English with titles such as *Elysium*, *Think of England*, and *Magdelane*. A touch repetitive at times but a terrific first act. The kids are alright... and the music, it is in good hands, looking to the future.

— By les siemieniuk

Chris Coole and Ivan Rosenberg

Return to Trion (Independent)



The marquee, er, album cover depicting two interplanetary travellin' musi-

cians starring in a sci-fi flick says it all: “Dobro and Claw. Amazing sounds the human ear has never heard before”. It's a bit of an exaggeration but it's true that Chris Coole's clawhammer banjo and Ivan Rosenberg's resophonic guitar make a mighty unique combination rarely heard in this corner of the galaxy. Both are virtual masters on their instruments and have a special knack for interpreting both traditional and modern songs, making them their own. Their version of The Band's *Stage Fright* should earn them fans across the universe. While Coole's voice is recognizable all over the Milky Way, Rosenberg also does fine versions of Jesse Winchester's *Glory to the Day* and Bill Trader's *A Fool Such as I*.

What a great soundtrack. I can hardly wait for the movie.

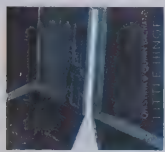
— By Mike Sadava



Chris Coole and Ivan Rosenberg

Kristina & Quinn Bachand

Little Hinges (Independent)



From a young age, these talented, B.C.-based siblings made a serious name for themselves in Canadian Celtic circles, racking up impressive recognition for their significant talents, at home and away. Their third release proves a progressive step forward, remaining loyal to their traditional teachings yet “opening the door” on fresh ideas to address the sounds both artists are hearing in their heads. Interestingly, the title track serves as a point of division between trad material and more progressive leanings.

The former category is well-served with stand-out entries such as *Crooked Jack*, with its jarring percussion nicely offsetting Kristina’s liquid-clear vocal, and their upbeat cover of Si Kahn’s *What You Do With What You’ve Got*, making the most of Kristina’s vocal quality, masterful fiddling and Quinn’s propulsive acoustic guitar. The lively *Bachand Jigs*, a loving tribute to their parents, explodes with dual fiddle, acoustic guitar, and banjo, paying homage to the roots of their beginnings. Yet, with the door to exploration kicked wide open, the shades are delightfully drawn on a more brooding second half. Songs such as *Hang Me*, with its processed



vocal and ominous samples, the other-worldly, atmospheric *Jimmy’s Fiddle* and the mysterious *Saint Nothing*, a glimpse into the afterlife, merging banjo with the threatening power of a thunderstorm, all serve notice that there’s more to life than dancing a jig.

The haunting *Never Goodbye* tempers eerie sadness with shards of light, offering a glimmer of hopefulness. That said, *Little Hinges* is an exciting marriage of new to old—the expected to the unexpected—from this talented twosome. Beginning with the clarity, if not majesty, of Kristina’s vocal strengths and fiddling genius, combined with Quinn’s mastery

over the dozen or so instruments he champions on this release, the stage is set for what’s to follow—as they shake the Celtic tree to bravely uncover what fresh fruit might fall to the ground.

— By Eric Thom

Jayme Stone

The Alan Lomax Project (Borealis)



Alan Lomax travelled the back roads of America, Europe, the Caribbean, and Africa for 50 years, going to prisons, plantations, coal mines, and front porches, recording people with his 75-pound “portable” tape recorder. He was fearless, suave, and pushy when needed, never afraid to approach people who had never heard a recording in their lives. He was an ethnomusicologist decades before the term was invented, and made thousands of recordings of what became the core of folk music. Along the way, he discovered influential singers such as Muddy Waters, Lead Belly, Reverend Gary Davis, and Woody Guthrie.

The collection has influenced modern-day artists, either directly or indirectly, whether putting a new take on an old song or in their own creations. Who knows where

the music we call folk would be without the Lomax collection, his “global jukebox”?

Jayme Stone is one of those who acknowledges the huge influence of Lomax. Stone, a stellar Canadian banjoist who now lives in Colorado, has done his own travel in search of local music, adapting his five-string instrument to music from around the world, as well as jazz and even classical.

Stone has dived deep into the Lomax collection and assembled a fantastic gaggle of musicians, including Tim O’Brien, Bruce Molsky, Brittany Haas, and Julian Lage, to name a few.

The result is a collection of fresh takes on old fiddle tunes, field hollers, and spirituals. Some you’ve heard, such as *Shenandoah* and *Old Paint*, but they dove well beneath the surface of the Lomax archive to find gems such as *Maids When You’re Young* and *Julie and Joe*. In every track you’ll hear the utter joy that came from making this record, and that joy is infectious.

Stone is travelling to festivals and universities holding workshops and presenting concerts on the Lomax archive. If it comes to your town, it’ll be worth attending—and buying this disc—if you’re interested in where most of your music comes from. Lomax, who died in 2003, would be proud.

— By Mike Sadava

Inge Thomson

Da Fishing Hands (Independent)



Da Fishing Hands started life when singer and accordionist Inge

Thomson was commissioned to write music inspired by the fishing grounds (hands) around the remote Scottish Island of Fair Isle. She worked with her cousin, Lise Sinclair, to create songs and instrumentals highlighting the environmental changes in their local waters and the detrimental effects of overfishing. Sadly, Sinclair passed away before the project was completed but Thom-



son carried on and the result is this fascinating collection. The album was recorded live with a five-piece band in one long session and successfully captures a feeling of immediacy and spontaneity. There's an inevitable sense of loss and sadness that prevails throughout but there are also glimmers of hope and a celebration of the Fair Islanders' strength of purpose and determination to preserve what they still have. A haunting and beautiful album.

— By Tim Readman

Jane Lewis

Stay With Me (Independent)



As one-third of Gathering Sparks and half of the

Lewis-Turton family, this album has been a long time coming. Clearly, the time was spent wisely. Of the dozen songs, two are covers smartly tucked in amidst solid originals, some co-written with Sam. But the star of this show is clearly Lewis who, in conjunction with her bell-clear, soulful voice, owns the piano. In fact, the combination of her passionate-yet-delicate vocals and her deft piano accompaniment flashes us back to both Laura Nyro and Carole King. A strong opening track calls on the talents of Jason Fowler (guitar), Jesse Turton (bass), Adam Bowman (drums), band-mate Eve Goldberg (harmony vocals) and Doug Wilde

(keys/strings) to project a propulsive band context under her distinctive approach to a lyric. It's the toned-down title track, however, that presents Lewis in the strongest light — voice and piano with minimal accompaniment. The song as hero — and a wonderful, heart-felt song it is.

Stay With Me is a spell-binding tapestry of musical approaches, all flowing from Lewis's imagination, capped off by a ridiculous amount of talent that should open many doors. Kudos to Sam Turton's impeccable production.

— By Eric G. Thom

Josh Rouse

The Embers of Time (Rykco)



For better than 15 years, Josh Rouse has been

turning out reliably tuneful, immaculately executed folk albums to consistent critical, if not overwhelming popular, acclaim. His second album, 1999's *Home*, has regularly found its way into my CD player for more than a decade.

The Embers of Time boasts many of the same attractive qualities — concise ditties with pretty, understated melodies, subtly layered backing tracks that never crowd Rouse's gentle delivery, and a wry lyrical outlook that never comes off as mannered or clever. *Too Many Things on My Mind* opens like shoe-string Steely Dan before finding a loping

Paul Simon vibe that also characterizes *Worried Blues*, while a calliope announces *You Walked Through the Door*, a stop-and-start number that nevertheless has a bouncy exuberance. Perhaps the most potent parts of *The Embers of Time*, however, favour a more spare, acoustic approach, increasing the emotional heft of tunes such as *Time*, *Coat for a Pillow*, and the sweetly sad *Expat Blues*, which blossoms into surging strings after a verse. Chalk up more critical acclaim for Josh Rouse.

— By Scott Lingley

Jorma Kaukonen

Ain't in No Hurry (Red House Records)



There are few people from the world of '60s pop

that remain vital today, though Jorma Kaukonen is certainly one of them. Famously a member of Jefferson Airplane, through the intervening decades he's gone from project to project, not so much reinventing himself as displaying different facets of his musical ability and his musical personality. He is, above all else, a wonderful blues guitar player, and that is beautifully on display here.

In the liner notes he writes "my choice of songs was always an effort to tell my story ... learning to play guitar was the gift that enabled me to set the story to music." The selections here really bear that out,

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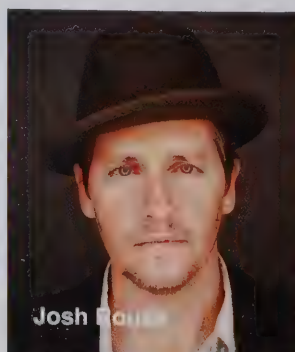
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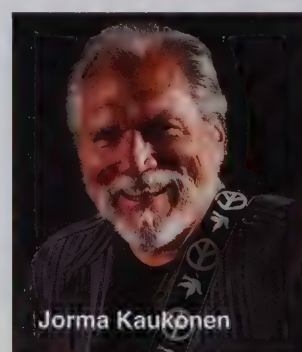
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Jane Lewis



Josh Rouse



Jorma Kaukonen

There are some standards, such as *Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out* and *Brother Can You Spare a Dime* though even the outliers, such as the Carter Family's *Sweet Fern*, feel central to the project.

Despite all of the directions his music has taken him in (he admits that it was the technology, such as a tape-delay system, that attracted him to Jefferson Airplane), Kaukonen still identifies as a folk musician, as indeed he should. He learned guitar at the foot of some of the best, including Reverend Gary Davis, and it shows beautifully even given all the intervening years. Like Dave Bromberg, he's a master of blues guitar who continues to earn and deserve our attention.

— By Glen C. Herbert

Muerte Pan Alley

Clunk & Sputter (Independent)



Falling somewhere between Mississippi hill country and

Beefheart, Californians Bob Keelaghan (guitars, banjo, lead vocals), Jason Woolley (drums, backing vocals) and San Fran import Rob Oxoby (acoustic bass, backup vocals) register Calgary as the new Oxford, MS. If their names sound familiar, it's because Keelaghan and Woolley also teamed in the Agnostic Mountain Gospel Choir while Oxoby made his mark in The Mutilitators. Mining much of the same turf—twisted Delta blues filtered through manic mountain music—the clunk and sputter erupts from turning up the torque, anointing all 12 tracks with an undeniably ragged, underground rock feel. If R.L. Burnside were to share a phone booth with the Black Keys, get strained through a garburator and then rolled down a hill, being chased by chainsaw-wielding hillbillies, you'd be close. Energetic, punk-frenetic rural blues with a dark hillbilly edge also yields a softer side.

With 11 originals on parade



here, there is genius at work yet their full potential is yet to be realized given what seems to be an overriding desire for complete irreverence. Fortunately, it's the music that triumphs.

— By Eric Thom

Pine Hill Project

Tomorrow You're Going (Independent)



Musical friends—you gotta have 'em 'cause they keep you

fresh. Richard Shindell and Lucy Kaplansky are musical friends, both with long and successful solo careers. In 1998 they teamed up with Dar Williams and recorded and toured as Cry Cry Cry.

A very nice break from their solo efforts.

Now they have teamed up as a duo under the moniker the Pine Hill Project, and apropos of the times, did some Kickstarter crowd-funding to raise money for the cause. It's also a very, very nice break from their solo efforts. *Tomorrow You're Going* is a collection of 11 songs from other songwriters they like, including the Grateful Dead, Nick Lowe, Gillian Welch, Dave Patscha, and Bono.

I loved their soulful take on Gillian Welch's *Wichita*, Greg

Brown's *Lately*, and especially Richard's achingly gentle lead on *Farewell to St. Dolores* from the too-small canon of David Carter and Tracy Grammer. Of course they do a great job on all of them, tastefully guided by producer Larry Campbell. It's a great effort and I'm glad they raised the money to pull it off.

— By les siemieniuk

The Full English

The Full English (Topic Records)



This compilation was developed by the English Folk Dance

and Song Society as part of their project to create the most comprehensive searchable database of predominately English folk songs, tunes, dances, and customs in the world. Folksinger and scholar Fay Hield was commissioned to pick through this massive resource and create this album. She recruited a fine group of musicians to record with—Seth Lakeman, Martin Simpson, Nancy Kerr, Sam Sweeney, Rob Harbron, and Ben Nicholls—and they provide a very appealing taster for what the archives contain. The main aim of the project is to inspire others to visit the archives and explore the wealth of material and *The*

Full English is the perfect way to provide that inspiration. To learn more and to enter this wonderful portal jump on your computer and surf over to <http://www.thefullenglishband.co.uk>.

— By Tim Readman

Cruinn

Storas (Independent)



Storas is a dignified collection of ancient and modern Gaelic

song from the acclaimed Rachel Walker, James Graham, Fiona Mackenzie, and Brian Ó hEadhra. Walker's classically trained voice is complemented well by the seann-nòs influences of Graham and Mackenzie; while Ó hEadhra's Irish tenor shines on his lead vocal excursions. All four voices add a lyricism to the lilting Gaelic melodies. Pipes, harmonica, piano, and accordion from Cruinn enrich the accompaniment of the guest musicians' fiddle, bass, and guitar and provide a subtle backing that allows the singing to come to the fore. *Storas* means treasure, wealth or abundance—and that says it all, really. They honour the tradition of Gaelic song and have laid down some fine work for future generations to continue singing.

— By Tim Readman

Pharis and Jason Romero

A Wanderer I'll Stay (Independent)



Unfair as it may seem, there's really no way not to compare Pharis

and Jason Romero to Gillian Welch and David Rawlings. The sonic similarities are undeniable, which is hardly an insult. But the Romeros of small-town B.C. have as much claim to the old-timey music couples sing together as the Welch-Rawlings of Berklee, the most marked difference deriving from the fact that Mr. Romero is a banjo maker by vocation. His picking imparts a more Appalachian feel on most of the tracks, a skill he gets to seize the spotlight on the instrumentals *Backstep Indi* and *Old September*. The Romeros' vocal pairing is just about perfect and, yeah, reminiscent of someone else of whom you may have heard. Whomever they sound like, they've made a highly enjoyable album, with the title track, *The Dying Soldier*, and a jangly *Cocaine Blues* testifying to a pleasing agility within the prevailing idiom.

— By Scott Lingley

Tadusak

Bide Luzea Ternauart (A Long Voyage to Newfoundland)
(Agoria)



The Basque group Tadusak has released its first album, *Bide Luzea Ternauart*, to acclaim in Europe. Led

by the singer Miren Fernández Frantsezena, the group plays and sings old stories about fishermen and seamen of the 16th-19th centuries. All the songs on the album are traditional, including the title song *Bide Luzea Ternauart* (A Long Voyage to Newfoundland). The band plays a wide variety of instruments, including acoustic guitar, bass guitar, bouzouki, piano, harmonium, hurdy gurdy, flute, Basque bagpipe, violin, and mandolin. The songs are about sea voyages, near and far. The



title song, *Bide Luzea Ternauart*, is a three-part tune telling first of departing for Newfoundland, the dangers of the sea, and finishing with the trials and suffering of the crew and passengers. The rest of the tunes are similar, with catchy melodies, well played. If your interests include world folk, this is an excellent recording to add to your collection. Even though you might not understand a word of Basque, the playing and singing are delightfully folky and play-worthy.

— By Gene Wilburn

Jeze Lowe

The Ballad Beyond (Tantobie)



Jeze Lowe is already one of the most respected tunesmiths of

his age but hearing him stretch an extra inch for the topical requirements of a BBC project, *The Ballad Beyond* speaks well for the now-rare practice of commissioning music. On this hour-long, 15-track anthology of tunes mostly written for the airwaves you will find the folksinger from Durham, England, taking on unlikely subjects such as the Olympics, though with an obvious political cast to *Berlin '36* and *Jesse Owens's Shoes*. There's a ghostly dream of

dead culture icons in *The Lazarus Dance*, and a darkly comic number about winding up on *The Wrong Bus* to the trenches of war by mistake.

Other tales set in cemeteries, coal mines, at fairgrounds or amidst the class wars take on more familiar themes but new angles bring a freshness to the telling. You can hear that in the range of musical meters too, and the marvellous mix of a dozen extra players and singers sitting in, with piper Andy May and violinists Kate Bramley and Kari MacLeod among them.

Diverting and thoughtful, it's one of Lowe's best.

— By Roger Levesque

Chris Culgin

It's Only Time (Independent)



Chris Culgin is an exceptional songwriter whose approach to his music

covers much ground. At its most basic, his guitar work hits a nerve while his vocals—a soothing, husky voice with a somewhat limited range—find their mark across a mélange of folk, blues, country, or rock, often merging all at once. You might think it simple, single-minded fare but it's so much harder to pull off than

one might suspect. Yet, the proof is in the pudding—showing all the signs of having considerable songwriting talent coupled with the chops to pull it off. Culgin needs only to commit to where he wants his music to go. There are worse problems to have; he clearly oozes with potential across standout songs.

Take the hearty opener, the anthemic *You Were Always Dancing*, with its unconventional lyrics, acoustic guitar leading to an epic, full-band sound with a killer chorus (Grainne Ryan's backup vocals play a key role). Add Culgin's own banjo to *Hell's A Box House*, quickening the pace, building to its beefy chorus. Insert Aaron Goldstein's pedal steel and the added texture of electric guitar (Sean Conway) and *You're Haunting My Favourite Place To Be* becomes another highlight. Oh, sure, he breaks many rules—awkward lyrics, twisted meter, and badly bent rhyme—but strong hooks, sophisticated songwriting, and smart arrangements transform this into a head-turning release.

These 12 originals are purely addictive, making *It's Only Time* absolutely haunting in its dexterity and sonic dynamism. Seek it out. His sophomore release, I can't wait to see where he's going next.

— By Eric Thom

The Ragtime Skedaddlers

The Latest Popular Mandolin and Guitar Music (Mandophone)



Chris Thile has talked about how the mandolin is one of least efficient

means of creating sound that you might hope to find. There's no sustain, not much volume, and the sound is thin, plinky, weak. It's the Ugly Betty of the fretted instrument world.

Fine. Then why is the mandolin still with us? Well, probably for the same reason that Ugly Betty is: character. It may not be pretty, but it brings a personality, that is simply hard to deny, which is why this new collection from the Ragtime Skedaddlers is such a delight. The name of the band, as the name of the disc, is a nod to where these guys are coming from: they're excellent musicians, but they're also not taking themselves entirely seriously. All of the pieces were composed between 1897 and 1915 – ragtime from the golden age, and one that these players know absolutely intimately. We all can name one ragtime composer—Scott Joplin—but how many of us can name two? These guys draw on a baker's dozen, and in the lovely liner notes, they tell us about them.

Using just banjo, mandolin, and guitar, this album is overflowing with a delightful, warm, infectious

character evocative of an entirely different age. It leaves you thinking, 'god, I love the mandolin.'

The cover is delightful, too, created by the graphic novelist Chris Ware. Between that and the notes, you'll want the hard copy of this one.

— By Glen C. Herbert

Buena Vista Social Club

Lost And Found (World Circuit)



The other day I was listening to Cuban music from the 50's, a small combo

headed up by the great bassist Cachao stirring up a guaracha, and I began to itch. Time has passed, the fever has cooled, but I began to recall the spell cast by the Buena Vista Social Club recordings which transported us to an alternate universe, glamorous and romantic, where we could have been if we'd only looked in the right direction. And been old enough.

On that very day news reached me of a new album of old Buena Vista. Outtakes, overlooks, music made at a time when so much good stuff was being recorded, there just wasn't room on all those CDs we were buying.

World Circuit producer Nick Gold, who originated this whole phenomenon, tells of repeated requests over the ensuing years: Is there more? There must be more! Fast forward to Now and



the touring Orquesta Buena Vista Social Club will be performing its Adios tour this year. Nick Gold relates, "We were always too busy working on the next project to go back and see what else we had. When we eventually found the time, we were astonished at how much wonderful music there was."

The Buena Vista Social Club changed things. Suddenly we had to re-evaluate our relationship with the music of a previous generation which we had dismissed. Could anything from our parents' generation be cool? With Buena Vista, real dances with real steps became important again. Big band, anyone?

So here is *Lost And Found*: recordings from a magical interstice, serendipitous circumstances that brought together the creators of an entire genre of music, music which influenced New York, Europe, Africa. Many of those musicians are no longer with us, but World Circuit has assembled gems from the original studio tracks recorded in the lovely wood-y acoustic of Havana's venerable Egrem Studios: Omara Portuondo's romantic crooning, Eliades Ochoa's "country-style" guitar, including a lovely after-hours instrumental grabbed when everyone except Ochoa (and, fortunately, a recording engineer) had left for the night.

As well there are live recordings from the ensuing international tours featuring the lovable Ibrahim

Ferrer, framed by the sound of an enormous audience rapt in complete adoration, and pianist Ruben Gonzalez' last-ever recorded solo.

Once again we are in the presence of the masters. This was no craze. It was a movement.

— By Lark Clark

Elvin Bishop

Can't Even Do Wrong Right (Alligator)



The first thing you notice on Elvin Bishop's *Can't Even Do Wrong Right*

is the hilarious cartoon-like folk-art painting of Paul Thorn, the ex-boxer turned terrific singer/songwriter. Paul has been adorning his own album covers forever and with this image of a hapless, cheating man caught in the bedroom between his furious wife and his naked lover, he gives us a hint of the fun and sense of humour to be found on Elvin's first album in five years.

This 71-year-old's guitar chops are as raw and powerful as ever and what I love about this recording is that it sounds like it was recorded in someone's garage (in a good way.) It makes you feel like you are there in that close, sweaty room with a collection of hot players laying down raw, greasy grooves and, most important, having a blast doing so! The blues rarely sound like this much fun.

The title track tells of the sad exploits of a series of losers who



are too intimate with Murphy's Law and who's streak of bad luck seems to be never-ending. *Old School* is about an older blues dog who just won't learn new tricks: "Call me on the phone man / Telephone's high tech as I get / Don't send me no email / Send me a female!" *No More Doggin'* is a raucous instrumental and like *Old School* features the legendary Charlie Musselwhite blowing some fabulous harp. Wonder if Elvin knows what doggin' means in Great Britain? *Let Your Woman Have Her Way* slows things down with a delicious organ-soaked ballad, reminiscent of his chart-topping hit *Fooled Around And Fell In Love* and features the same vocalist, Jefferson Starship's Mickey Thomas.

Can't Even Do Wrong Right has been nominated for five Blues Music Awards to be held in May, 2015 in Memphis, TN.

— By Michael Wrycraft

Connie Kaldor

Love Sask (Independent)



Ms. Kaldor has been a prominent voice in my music collection since

the good old days, so long ago when everything was new and wonderful. My collection has grown as I have...and she's still an important part of it.

She has a lot going for her. A great voice, a stunning way with words, a musical sensibility that transcends genres and a performance style rooted in musical theatre—she delivers a song to you like no one can. She has never reminded me of anyone, she's always been her own unique person—on record and in concert—always delivering the goods emotionally and intellectually.

This 11-song collection ranges from a purely Canadian prairie ode to Saskatchewan, *Love Sask*, to a beautiful love song to a partner, *Think of You*. You also get a stunning choral arrangement of *Nothing Like a Lake*, musings on what they're doing on *Andromeda*,



Nell Robinson and Jim Nunally

and good Ukrainian grandmotherly words to live by—*If You Like Her Perogies, She'll Like Your Kubasa*. You can plant the girl in Montreal for decades but she was forged in the dusty heat and frigid cold of the Canadian prairie.

Love Sask is a worthy addition to all of Connie's material that has come before and truly helps cement her place as one of the shining lights of the Canadian musical landscape.

— By les siemieniuk

Slow Leaves

Beauty Is So Common (Independent)



Winnipeg singer/songwriter Grant Davidson's songs are the core of *Slow*

Leaves. Davidson started as a solo act with two previous discs: *Tired Limbs For Ashes* (2009) and *Dust and Violets* (2011). On the new disc he's teamed up with producer/arranger Rusty Matyas and although the results still sound like a single singer/songwriter there's an added depth with the two of them playing all the instruments.

The focus is still Davidson's fine, clear voice (sometimes double-tracked for harmonies) and his way with words. He always

seems to find an original way to phrase things. There's not any fancy production; the tracks are just guitar, bass, drums, keys, voice, and harmonica but there's a focus and solidity to the sound that really punches through. The disc lands running with the strong opening of *Everybody Wants To Be In Love*, and other highlights are *Second Chances*, *Neighbourhood Watch*, and *Institution*. It's a solid, well-recorded disc from a fine singer/songwriter, with good cover art by Veronica Ebert, sporting a liner quote from Jorge Luis Borges. A damn good disc.

— By Barry Hammond

Nell Robinson & Various Artists

The Rose Of No-Man's Land (Nell Robinson

Music/Compass Records)



Hilary Perkins, better known as Nell Robinson (a name she

took from her grandmother), had a career in activism before she launched her singing career in her mid-forties. Her fine, clear voice has been compared to Patsy Cline, Emmylou Harris, Dolly Parton, and Hazel Dickens. She's had three previous discs before

this latest, which draws on her family's history, spoken word excerpts from historical writings, letters and poems, and songs from traditional ballads to an array of songwriters such as Bill Monroe, Rodney Crowell, Johnny Cash, Guy Clark, and Mel Tillis. The subject is war and the sacrifices made over 250 years from the American Revolution, through the World Wars and Vietnam, to the present day. Guest voices include actress Kathy Baker, Kris Kristofferson (who lends his colourful voice to a letter from 1866), Ramblin' Jack Elliott, John Doe, Maxine Hong Kingston, and singing partner Jim Nunally. Greg Leisz supplies slide guitar and mandolin and ace producer Joe Henry presides over the lot with a sure hand. There are some great voices and fine musical moments full of patriotism and emotion, the best songs in this critic's opinion, being *Johnny Has Gone For A Soldier*, *One Morning In May*, *Scots Irish*, and *The Forgotten Soldier Boy*. Ramblin' Jack Elliott does a good job on the Johnny Cash song, *Drive On*, too. If you want to see it, it's also done as a *Gone Public TV* episode on PBS.

— By Barry Hammond

Ron Kavana

Forgotten People (Real Records)



Forgotten People tells the story of Irish immigration to Canada during

the 19th century. It is a sort of followup to Kavana's very popular quadruple CD *Irish Ways: The Story of Ireland in Song, Music and Poetry*. Summing up the project in his local Cork and Limerick newspaper, he explained that, "During the peak period of emigration in Irish history: 1845-50 and the following decades of the 19th century, some four and a half million men, women, and children fled cruel and unjust British rule in their homeland in hope of a better life elsewhere.". There are songs of parting such as *Liverpool Ceili*, tales of sailing such as *On the Rollin' Sea*, homesick laments, notably *Vale of Avondhu*, and the inevitable 'should I stay or should I go' piece in the form of the *You're the One* medley. It features loads of great guests, including Shannon Johnson, James Keelaghan, and Leonard Podolak, and is well worth checking out.

— By Tim Readman

Lynched

Cold Old Fire (Independent)



Lynched have unleashed a rough and ready album of traditional Irish

songs (and their close cousins) that hits you like a shot in the

arm. It evokes memories of The Dubliners and The Pogues. The songs are delivered fresh and raw in nasal Dublin accents with basic and rightly sparse accompaniment from fiddle, whistle, pipes, squeeze box, and guitar. In an era populated with schooled musicians delivering meticulous recordings, it is refreshing to hear a band getting back to basics so successfully. The singing is heartfelt, evocative, and gets the tale across in no uncertain fashion. In case any of you need reminding, it's supposed to be folk music. So let's have more spit, less polish, and more of the likes of Lynched.

— By Tim Readman

Wil

El Paseo (Cordova Bay Records)

It's evident from the opening seconds of the first track that Wil (William Mimnaugh), the main songwriter and multi-instrumentalist in this band, and co-producer Jayme Langen, who co-writes one song and is also all over the place as a player, love complex arrangements, a lot of different sounds, and take infinite care with the soundscapes they create for these songs.

They don't just record a song but shape it into an aural landscape of depth and intricacy. Mimnaugh has been at it for awhile, recording his first disc, *Both Hands*, in 2002, followed with *By December* (2007), *In This Together* (2010), *Heart Of Mine* (2011), *Hold Me On* (2012), and *Live at The Ironweed* (2013). He's also no stranger

to a filmic sense in that his song *Roam* was chosen to represent the Travel Alberta ad campaign *Remember To Breathe*, which won the Diamond Award for Best Overall Entry at ITB Berlin and his *There Is* won gold there the next year. His song *Ride* was also the official theme song for the 100th anniversary of the Calgary Stampede. This is a terrific collection of little aural movies that will stick in your head. *Make Make* is already playing on CKUA and CBC.

— By Barry Hammond



The Enigma of Nic Jones

DVD (Topic Records)



In February 1982, on the road between Peterborough and March in Cambridgeshire, England, Nic

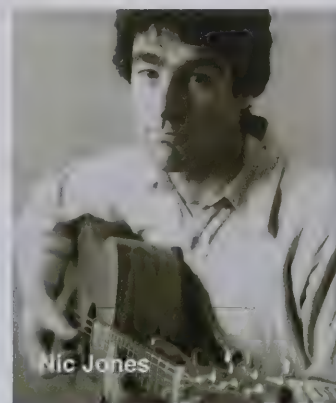
Jones had a horrific car crash. He was widely considered to be the best thing since sliced bread on the folk circuit, and at the age of 35 was promising to get even better. The crash smashed his life and his body to pieces. Not long before, he had released *Penguin Eggs*, from which the magazine you have in your hands took its name. That release appealed to an extremely wide cross-section of music fans and transcended the 'folk' label even though it features a solo singer playing mostly traditional songs on an acoustic guitar. "I'm a fraud, an impostor," he has been quoted as saying. "I came into folk music by accident. I wanted to be in a rock group. I was a Buddy Holly fan and I wanted to be in The Shadows...except I could never do the dance."

This DVD tells Nic's story as he prepares the Nic Jones Trio for his return to performing at Warwick Folk Festival in July 2012. We learn how his wife, Julia, asked

fans to send her their bootleg recordings so she could use them to bring him out of his coma. There are interviews with his first band mates from The Halliard who tell tales of the early days. Martin and Eliza Carthy, Ashley Hutchings, Jim Moray, John Hegley, Anais Mitchell and several other luminaries explain why Nic is so important and why everyone in their right mind has a copy of *Penguin Eggs*, whether they think they like folk music or not.

We hear about his searches for new material in the archives of London's Cecil Sharp House, and how he thought nothing of rewriting the songs he found there. All the time we keep returning to his 'comeback' show, with his doppelganger son Joe on guitar (the apple clearly didn't fall far from the tree—he plays like Nic!) and the marvellous Belinda O'Hooley on piano. It's a riveting watch and in spite of the intense emotion surrounding the event, Jones takes it all in his stride and sings brilliantly, in his own inimitable fashion. In case we didn't already know, by the end of the film it is clear that Nic Jones is both a legend and a truly original and gifted musician. We can thank our lucky stars he ended up becoming a folksinger by accident because he has fuelled the imagination and helped form the repertoire of many of today's successful folkies. He's also been responsible for inspiring our own esteemed editor to start this magazine, without which, just like Nic, our lives would be that much poorer.

— By Tim Readman





Les Hay Babies

Elles chantent de jolies harmonies avec un accent acadien saisissant, faisant connaître leur culture de par les océans. Par Tony Montague. Trad par Véronique Garneau-Allard

Les Hay Babies sont parties en tournée en Europe de nombreuses fois depuis la formation de leur groupe à la fin 2011. Toutefois, leur succès à l'étranger ne signifie pas le desserrement du lien qui les unit aux communautés acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick qui les a vues grandir toutes les trois.

«C'est important pour nous de ne pas oublier d'où nous venons», dit la guitariste acoustique du groupe Vivianne Roy, également auteure et interprète, tout comme ses amies Julie Aubé (banjo) et Katrine Noël (ukulele). «En fait, les tournées internationales ont pour effet de nous faire voir notre ville d'origine d'un autre point de vue et de nous inciter davantage à la réflexion.»

La musique des Hay Babies est un mélange lumineux et imaginatif de musique folk, pop, soft-rock, ancienne et country, aux paroles poétiques et sans prétention. Elles écrivent et chantent en acadien, un mélange

surprenant de français (et d'ancien français, diront la plupart des francophones) parsemé d'anglais.

Le jeu de mots à l'origine du nom de leur groupe en dit long sur leur approche. «Notre français est truffé de mots anglais. C'est très naturel pour nous de dire quelque chose comme «Les Hay Babies». Mais le *Les* est très important, il fait toute la différence et indique que nous sommes un groupe bilingue. Pour nous, notre nom est en français. Nous venons d'un endroit assez bilingue.»

Les trois femmes ont grandi dans différentes villes du Nouveau-Brunswick : Katrine Noël à Dalhousie, près de la frontière du Québec, Julie Aubé à Memramcook, près de Moncton, et Vivianne Roy à Rogersville, au centre de la province. «Je viens d'une très petite ville, seulement 1 200 habitants. Je travaillais dans une épicerie, alors j'ai eu l'occasion de rencontrer toutes sortes de personnes, et la plupart des habitants de la ville. C'est un genre de ville de bûcherons, une communauté très accueillante. Nous écoutions toutes de la musique country et du *classic rock* étant jeunes.»

Comme sources d'inspiration principales, Vivianne Roy cite Wilco, Julie Doiron, Feist, et après avoir fait une pause, elle ajoute Bob Dylan, Townes Van Zandt, Cat Stevens, Crosby Stills and Nas, et Neil Young, «cette époque musicale-là». Un parfum de nostalgie plane sur beaucoup des chansons des Hay Babies, qui rappellent les soeurs McGarrigle. Leur premier album,

Mon Homesick Heart, donne à entendre des harmonies riches et agréables sans être trop sentimentales.

Elles étaient toutes les trois des auteures-compositrices-interprètes émergentes lorsqu'elles se sont rencontrées dans un concours, au Nouveau-Brunswick. Elles sont devenues des amies, et trois ans plus tard, elles ont décidé de former un groupe. La popularité leur est tombée dessus peu après, venant d'un endroit improbable. Pendant plusieurs années, le Festival Interceltique de Lorient, en Bretagne, a offert une scène aux artistes acadiens. «Un des gars de la programmation venait de Moncton, et comme nous étions des artistes émergents, il nous a invitées. Il fallait jouer deux fois par jour pendant une dizaine de jours. C'était une expérience très intense, car nous venions à peine de commencer en tant que groupe.

«On se sentait comme dans un camp d'entraînement. Mais c'était génial. Quand nous sommes revenues, nous nous étions beaucoup améliorées et nous avions aussi beaucoup de plaisir à jouer ensemble. C'était la première fois que nous avons joué en France. Au festival, il y avait d'autres artistes qui venaient de notre coin qui nous ont montré comme se comporter avec les Français, parce qu'on vient un peu du fond du bois et c'est pas toujours facile de faire bonne impression.»

La rencontre avec les Français s'est plutôt bien passée, malgré, ou probablement grâce aux difficultés de compréhension liées à la

langue.

«Certaines de nos expressions françaises datent de 400 ans, ce qui a déstabilisé plus d'un Français au début», se rappelle Vivianne, jointe par téléphone cellulaire dans un restaurant dans le centre de la France, au cours de son treizième voyage en Europe en moins de trois ans. «En plus, notre accent acadien est très différent de l'accent québécois. Il faut dire que les gens ont fait preuve d'une belle ouverture, et je crois que notre accent en a intrigué plus d'un.»

Les Français linguistiquement raffinés risquent de s'étouffer avec leurs canapés en entendant des paroles comme «yinke d'la junk anyway» (qui rejettent la télévision), de la chanson *J'suis pas une femme à marier*, pleine d'humour et aux accents bien country. Dans tous les cas, Vivianne et ses collègues demeurent intègres par rapport à leur origine et à leur identité.

«Nous ne voulons pas être prétentieuses dans la manière dont nous parlons. Nous ne voulons pas essayer de chanter d'une manière qui ne nous ressemble pas. Quand nous avons commencé, nous voulions simplement être capables de jouer dans notre propre ville. Notre ambition était limitée et nous ne convoitions pas la scène musicale

québécoise. Nous voulions que ça reste naturel. Les gens nous auraient probablement jugées si nous avions chanté en français standard.»

En spectacle, Les Hay Babies peuvent prendre la forme d'un trio acoustique ou être accompagnées par quelques musiciens. Pour *Mon Homesick Heart*, le producteur François Lafontaine, claviériste au sein du groupe québécois de rock indépendant Karkwa, a invité quelques amis à rajouter de la chair autour de l'os. «Il avait de grandes ambitions et il voulait inviter les musiciens avec qui il avait l'habitude de jouer. C'était vraiment super.»

Point positif, les éléments rock sont utilisés judicieusement et ne couvrent pas les éléments acoustiques folk. Ces deux éléments se marient admirablement bien sur la pièce *Fil de Téléphone*, écrite et interprétée par Vivianne Roy, où sont condensées les aspirations des Hay Babies, présentes dans plusieurs de leurs chansons. Le dernier vers du refrain, «notre amour se tient par un fil de téléphone» pique la curiosité. Quelle histoire cache-t-il?

«J'avais peur que vous me le demandiez», répond Vivianne en riant. «J'ai rencontré un gars à Moncton quand je vivais là-bas et je

suis tombée amoureuse de lui. Peu après, nous partions en tournée en Europe. Nous avons maintenu la relation à distance, mais vous savez ce que c'est, ce genre de truc ne peut pas durer indéfiniment.»

Les Hay Babies n'ont pas l'intention d'arrêter les tournées de sitôt. «Une autre tournée, en majeure partie au Québec, nous attend en avril avec le groupe élargi. Nous serons aussi à Paris pour La Fête de la Musique (le 21 juin) et nous espérons aller au Texas en septembre et peut-être en Louisiane. Nous voulions prendre une année sabbatique, mais finalement, nous allons simplement prendre une pause de deux mois entre deux tournées. Hier encore, nous étions en train d'élaborer le concept de notre prochain album.

Julie est en train d'écrire un recueil de poésie. Pour ma part, je travaille sur un projet solo appelé *Laura Sauvage*, à Montréal. Les Hay Babies sont notre priorité, mais il faut laisser sortir sa créativité ailleurs aussi, pour pouvoir revenir dans le groupe avec sa propre personnalité et combattre l'homogénéité. Chacune d'entre nous expérimente la création dans d'autres contextes pour être en mesure d'apporter au groupe quelque chose de nouveau.»

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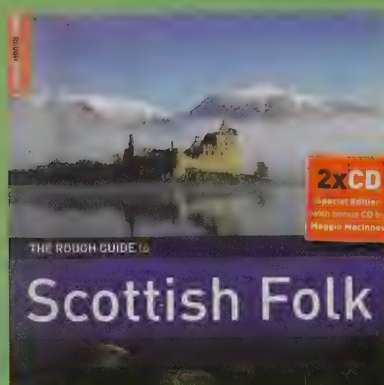
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The Freels

À découvrir: jeunes Terre-Neuviens jouant joyeusement giges et reels avec vitalité et facilité.

Trouver un bon nom de groupe n'est pas une tâche facile. Les musiciens veulent quelque chose de simple, mais d'évocateur, un nom qui résume leur essence. Ce ne sont pas tous les groupes qui réussissent à trouver le nom parfait. Quand on entend les mots Matchbox 20 (boîte de 20 allumettes), on pense davantage à un pyromane ou à un cancer du poumon qu'à des rockers indépendants à l'air propre. Par contre, le nom The Freels est bien trouvé et représente bien l'image de jeunes Terre-Neuviens jouant joyeusement des giges et des reels avec vitalité et facilité.

The Freels, dont la musique provient des riches traditions de Terre-Neuve et de l'Irlande, tire son nom du cap Freels sur la rive nord de la baie Bonavista. En 2011, Anthony Chafe (guitare), Andrew Fitzgerald (violon, bodhrán), Danny Mills (flûte, sifflements) et Maria Peddle (chanteuse principale, violon) sont tous membres de The Celtic Fiddlers, un imposant groupe de musique traditionnelle formé de jeunes. De fil en aiguille, ils deviennent amis et décident de former leur propre groupe. Un an plus tard, le joueur de concertina/accordéon émergent Fergus Brown-O'Byrne se joint à eux. Anthony se rappelle : « Notre premier concert a eu lieu lors de la cérémonie d'illumination de l'arbre de Noël à Bowering Park. La foule était immense et nous tremblions de nervosité,

mais c'était un bon début et nous avions espoir en l'avenir. »

Les Freels, dont les membres ont entre 19 et 29 ans, en sont à un point de leur vie où la poursuite de leurs études ou de leur carrière est une priorité. Maria Peddle a été choisie pour un échange d'un an organisé par le Rotary, en 2014-2015, et Danny Mills a décidé de s'inscrire dans un programme de maîtrise en administration à Waterford, Irlande. Avant de se séparer temporairement, ils se sont embarqués dans une campagne de financement participatif pour produire leur premier CD.

« Nous voulions avoir un CD, ne serait-ce que pour nous-mêmes, parce que nous savions que Danny et Maria partaient pour un an et nous voulions enregistrer l'album avant leur départ, comme ça, quoiqu'il arrive, nous allons pouvoir dire que nous l'avons fait, commente Anthony. « On a l'intention de reformer le groupe si tout le monde revient à la maison, mais pour le moment, on suit le courant. »

Leur album éponyme, disponible sous l'étiquette SingSong Records réunit un ensemble rafraîchissant et charmant de chansons et d'airs traditionnels et contemporains. Il comprend une version celtique amusante de *Cecilia*, de Paul Simon, juxtaposée au classique instrumental écossais *Jean's Reel* (le reel de Jean). Alors que beaucoup de groupes de Terre-Neuves se bornent à jouer du matériel provenant exclusivement de Terre-Neuve (comme The Dardanelles), le répertoire de The Freels puise principalement dans les traditions irlandaises et terre-neuviennes, et secondairement dans n'importe quelle

source, pourvu que la chanson les touche personnellement.

« Nous reconnaissons tous les ressemblances de structure des airs irlandais et terre-neuviens, mais généralement, nous partageons la même vision quand il est question de savoir si un son est bon et s'il produit une bonne énergie », déclare Brown-O'Byrne.

« La plupart de nos répétitions sont des séances d'improvisation musicale, nous essayons différentes choses. Nos arrangements sont assez spontanés; il y a un peu de peaufinage lors des étapes finales, mais la plupart du temps, on joue et on voit où ça nous mène. »

– Par Jean Hewson

– Traduit par Véronique G.-Allard

Michael Jerome Browne

Sliding Delta (Borealis)

Michael Jerome Browne n'a pas son pareil pour voyager dans le temps. Ses recherches portent sur 100 ans de blues, qu'il prend plaisir à explorer et à mettre en valeur. Ses albums primés présentent habituellement des compositions de son cru, accompagnées d'une bonne sélection de reprises de blues d'époque, difficiles à distinguer de ses nouvelles pièces originales.

Sixième album à paraître sous l'étiquette Borealis Records, *Sliding Delta* est un hommage joyeux aux géants du blues des années 20 et 30, piliers de tout chanteur de blues contemporain qui se respecte, composé exclusivement de reprises. Le choix des chansons ne s'étant pas basé sur leur popularité, il permet la découverte de chansons moins connues, telles des perles repêchées et admirées à la lumière du jour.

Ce qui différencie cet album des autres enregistrements de ce guitariste aux doigts de magicien est sa simplicité : on y découvre un homme seul avec son instrument, que ce soit le banjo, la mandoline, l'une de ses nombreuses guitares anciennes ou l'harmonica, qu'il manie à l'occasion.

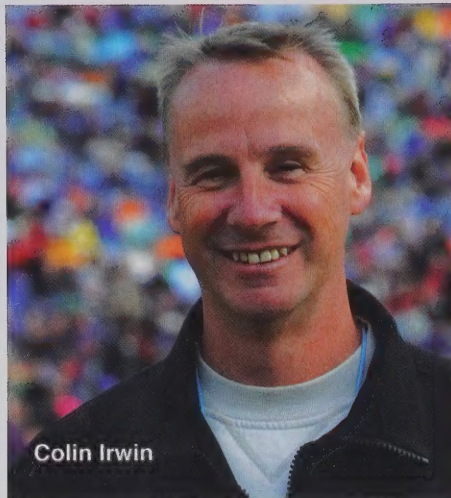
Blind Willie McTell, Memphis Minnie, Fred McDowell, Mississippi John Hurt, Blind Lemon Jefferson et Skip James, pour n'en mentionner que quelques-uns, sont tous honorés ici. Parmi la vaste sélection d'airs, le blues de McTell *Broke Down Engine* et *Special Rider Blues* de Skip James se démarquent du lot.

L'album se termine sur une note spirituelle avec *Choose Your Seat And Sit Down*, un duo avec Eric Bibb, partenaire de tournée de Michael et musicien exceptionnel dont les albums présentent fréquemment Michael comme musicien invité.

– Par Michael Wrycraft

– Traduit par Véronique G.-Allard

A Point Of View



Colin Irwin

Talkin' 'bout my g-g-generation. Colin Irwin is. Well, sort of. What has age got to do with making good music? he ponders. Nothing, really. But youth, be bold, he insists.

Nostalgia, they tell me, is a thing of the past.

See, age is a contentious matter when it comes to music. I used to be a bit of a Nazi on the subject, declaring that musicians should be physically barred from recording studios once they'd hit the age of 40 because they couldn't possibly have anything new to say. "Take the Rolling Stones," I'd explain to the horrified audience who assumed I'd been on the wacky backy, "they haven't made a decent record since *Start Me Up* in 1981."

"What about the blues people then?" they'd say. "Muddy Waters was 41 when he recorded *Hoochie Coochie Man* and made his best recordings long after that—would you deny the world the best of Muddy?"

"No, 'course not," I'd say. "Muddy is the exception. Special dispensation for Muddy..."

"And Willie Nelson...he was 42 when he recorded *Red Headed Stranger*"

"Well, apart from Willie...obviously!"

"And Lead Belly was..."

"Yeah, yeah..."

Now, reflecting on the great success and genuine sense of adventure offered in their dotage by the likes of Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan, I'm coming around to the opposite point of view. I mean, where would we be without Johnny Cash's heartbreaking version of *Hurt* when he was past 70? In fact, any of those Rick Rubin *American Recordings* albums. And last year, Martin Carthy, aged 73, made an album called *The Moral Of The Elephant* with his daughter Eliza, which is as bold, daring, risky,

and exciting as anything he's ever previously recorded during his long and brilliant career.

And right now, I'm listening to Van Morrison, aged 69, belting his heart out on his new *Duets* album with the likes of Natalie Cole, Mavis Staples, and Joss Stone, as if his life depends on it, displaying a passion, conviction, and gnarled world-weariness you never hear from anyone under 40!

So now I'm thinking maybe artists shouldn't be allowed to record until they are at least 30. That would, for one thing, have saved the lives of Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison, and Amy Winehouse. It would also save our ears from being assaulted by One Direction and Wotsisname Bieber.

The modern technological world and the Internet has much to commend it in terms of liberating the music industry and releasing musicians (and listeners) from being at the mercy of record company whims and all those cloth-eared radio programmers. But, at the risk of sounding like a grumpy old git, the ease of releasing material these days also encourages the nascent star to bombard the world with imagined genius as soon as they've mastered three chords and penned their first unspeakably wretched angst-ridden ballad about the heartlessness of unrequited love.

OK, OK, old Leonard Cohen did all that stuff in his early days but he usually shrouded it in a bit of mystery with a few literary and religious allusions to keep you guessing.

It's not a case of kids today not knowing they've been born...or even of not paying their dues...although a few years on the road living off baked beans, playing every sleazy dive in Nowheresville and sleeping on damp wooden floors with a family of rats would do plenty to focus the mind and offer proper insight into the ways of the world and the characters who make it go round.

Don't get me wrong. There are lots of brilliant young musicians emerging at pace from all corners of the universe every day. Musicians are technically far superior to their predecessors half a century ago. Yet something is invariably missing and they often merely seem to ape what has gone before and are bereft of ideas. Even, dare I say, Mumford & Sons...as vigorous, jolly, tuneful, and banjoey as they may be, offered more style than substance on their second album.

The advantage the folk revivalists of old had, of course, was that there was no template. No YouTube then to check out the old acts, few records available to hear them, and nobody

looking over their shoulders to tell them they're not doing it right. It was all new; everyone followed their own instincts and, from Bob Dylan to Phil Ochs, Gordon Lightfoot to Joni Mitchell, Davy Graham to Bert Jansch, and Simon & Garfunkel to Fairport Convention, they wrote their names large across the empty pages.

Nobody then ever imagined they'd make a career out of music. They just loved what they were doing, were surprised when they got paid to do gigs and, 30 years later, found they were still at it. By which time some of them had become almost proficient.

What we need now is for all these glittering young talents to rip out those pages and just do their own thing.

For now they come tumbling out of colleges, well versed in the theory and technique with a barrel full of marketing ideas and the entire history of the music at their fingertips on the end of a computer...and announce they are to be professional musicians and three weeks later release their debut album.

Everyone is just so damn sensible and career-minded now. A great musician isn't just about the notes he/she plays, it's about character and experience, observation and real life. When Johnny Cash sang, "*I shot a man in Reno just to watch him die*" it was utterly believable that he might have done just that.

Where are the young folk musicians going completely off message to startle, shock, maybe offend, and ultimately inspire? Where are those adopting an angle on the music nobody has ever considered before? Who, to use a terrible cliché, is thinking outside the box?

The talent is there, just not the imagination. In such a multicultural world, you'd fondly hope a natural blend of style and history would organically develop to create an entirely original hybrid that would blow everything apart and set us all on an exciting new path of exploration and discovery.

The danger when you talk this way is that young bands are formed with the express intention to shock and amaze and end up sounding embarrassingly forced; or else they fuse different styles together in a hopelessly manufactured fashion that convinces nobody. Above all, it has to be real and honest and done for the right reasons.

Until that happens, we'll be forced to suffer pollution of the airwaves through musical politeness, slavish imitation, and moribund imagination. Unless...we institute that ban on the under-30s...

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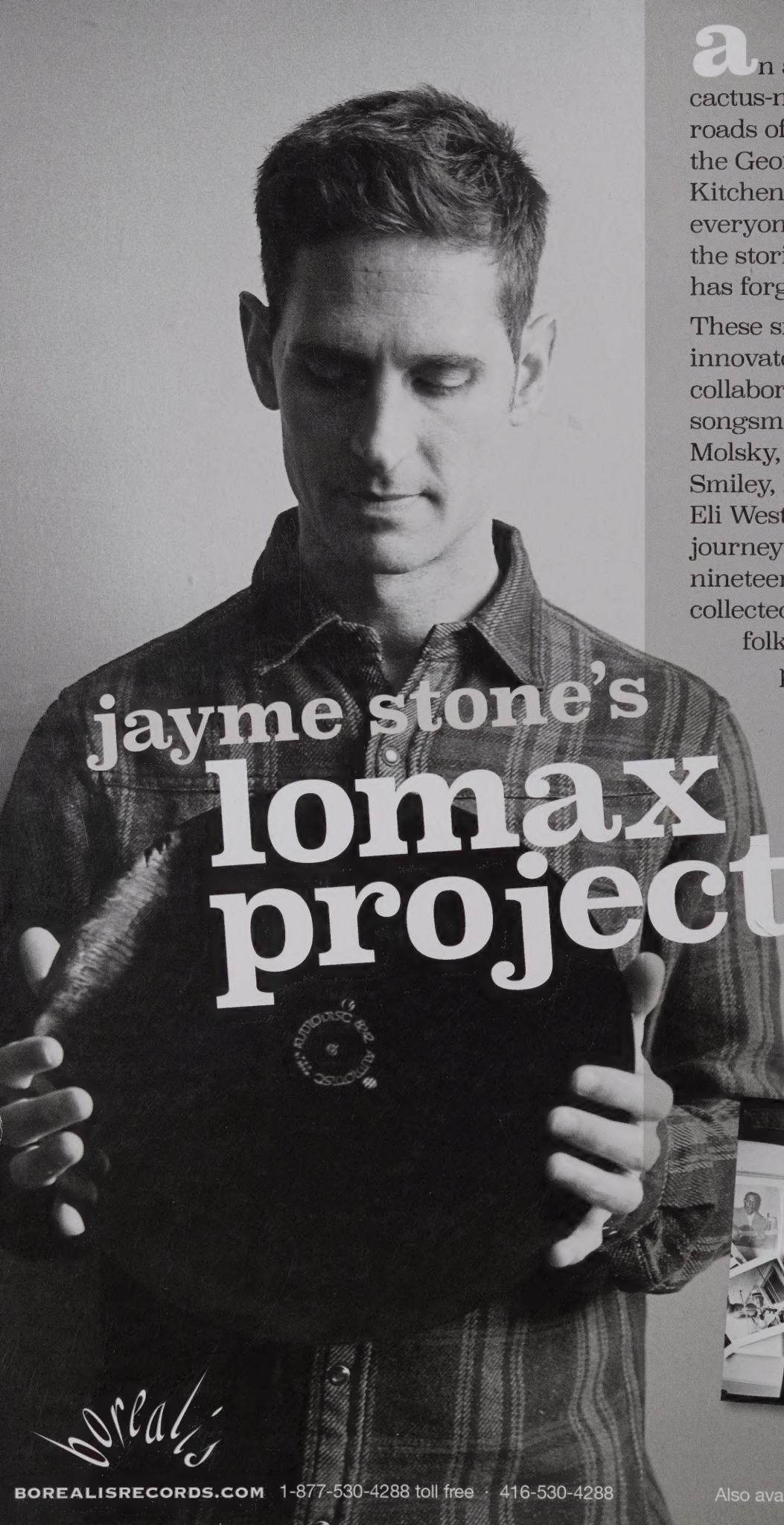
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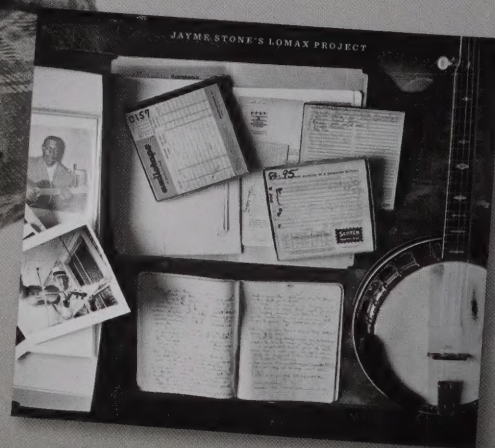
an acetate disc cutter and cactus-needle stylus. The rutted roads of eastern Kentucky and the Georgia Sea Island coastline. Kitchen din and street noise. Songs everyone has come to know — and the storied singers nearly everyone has forgotten.

These snapshots guided banjo innovator Jayme Stone and his collaborators — Grammy-winning songsmith Tim O'Brien, Bruce Molsky, Margaret Glaspy, Moira Smiley, Brittany Haas, Julian Lage, Eli West and more — on a year-long journey to research and recast nineteen carefully chosen songs collected by iconic American folklorist and field recording pioneer Alan Lomax.

"I'm not a preservationist," Stone emphasizes.

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From Appalachia to Trinidad, rural communities to juke joints, the musicians we have forgotten reverberate in these beautiful and innovative renditions.



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